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A BREAKER OF SHIPS

By *FREDERICK SLEATH* ::

Author of "Sniper Jackson," "The Seventh Vial,"
"The Hill of the Crows," etc. :: :: ::

Just why not?
1873
Hutchinson
SECOND EDITION,

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TO
WILLIAM DOUGLAS SLEATH
IN
AFFECTION AND RESPECT

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A Breaker of Ships

CHAPTER I

A DEAL IN SHIPS

I

BIG Jim Martin, founder, managing director, and joint owner with his mother of the Carn Shipbreaking and Salvage Company, was a tremendous man, broad as the bole of a fifty-year oak, stronger than any two of the thousand men employed by him; six feet four in his stocking soles, six feet six in his boots—these being big and heavy, very like sea-boots cut down; but it was not because of his size and strength alone that men called him "Big Jim." His personality was tremendous. The nickname was his from the day he came as a rival and associate among his fellow shipbreakers. They learned afterwards, and with no surprise that, all over the world, wherever dwelt men who knew ships and the ways of them, he was known and by the same name.

Summer and winter alike, he wore the same clothes: two suits and two suits only, one for the office and one for away trips; and the two sets of garments were identical—a coat of thin, hard, slate-blue worsted, cut short, the better to serve its purpose as jacket also, like an Army officer's British Warm; a double-breasted vest of black ministerial cloth, trousers of similar material, and a black soft felt hat, a cross between a Stetson and a Homburg, something akin to that worn by the more

evangelical of Dissenting parsons. But odd as they were, these clothes were the result of a process of evolution through many strenuous years, and served him well. In the five years before the outbreak of the Great War, for example, during which period he was building up his business, not a single garment had he needed to renew.

Nor did he ever look shabby. There was a goodliness about his appearance from which no threadbareness of attire could detract: the goodliness of perfect health and unimpaired vitality, and all the outward effects of such things. His brown hair and beard were thick and lustrous; his skin and eyes were clear. He might have been any age from thirty to sixty, for he had the easy quickness in movement of the one, and the mature dignity of the other.

He wore his beard in a peculiar fashion—parted at the chin, each portion trained over its nearest shoulder; a peculiarity which caused to be disclosed a spotless boiled shirt and Rosebery collar, and—perhaps the real object of the parting—instead of a tie, a stud carrying a diamond that would have brought five hundred pounds in any market.

It was the only trace of personal vanity that he showed, the sole outward sign of the great wealth possessed by him. Wealth won long before he set up in business as a shipbreaker! He had sailed, pearled, prospected and traded, fought great fights on land and sea against nature and man—and triumphed. Yet he came to Carn to be taken for a pious old mariner desirous of settling down with his modest savings to a life of farming by the sea.

So thought the landowner who once had owned the strip of coastal land on which the shipbreaking yard was laid out, and who had hastened to gratify the pious man's desire—at an excellent price, certainly, judged by agricultural values, but at a mere fraction of what he would have charged had he known either Big Jim's real intentions or his capacity to pay; or, for that matter, his

eagerness to buy. For Big Jim had travelled far before coming on a site so suited to his purpose.

The sheltered estuary by which it lay had a high rise and fall of tide, and a firm, gently sloping beach, two qualities which made it an easy matter to bring ships ashore in convenient position for breaking; and the nearness of Carn, a seaport on a main railway line, made it just as easy to clear his yard of their steel and equipment. Yet in spite of these very great advantages, the other shipbreakers as greatly under-estimated the possibility of his making a success of the business as the landowner had the extent of his wealth.

That was the particular quality—his power to conceal the direction and scope of his intentions—which characterised him most, and though often a source of great irritation to his friends, whom he liked to keep almost as much in the dark as his rivals, backed as it was by his uncanny knowledge of men and things and an energy almost inexhaustible, it made him the most formidable of competitors in whatever pursuit he liked to engage.

In less than a year he had equipped and staffed his yard, pushed out his landing piers, and brought the first batch of ships ashore. In five, he had established himself as the leading man in the trade. No one could outbid him profitably; his knowledge of ships and their breaking values was too intimate and certain. But no one was more ready than he to extend a helping hand; and his success was scarcely grudged him. Among all his many rivals he had but a single enemy—Hermann Finket, the man who had striven most against him from the beginning, and who had persistently refused to be conciliated.

Before his coming, Finket had been planning to establish himself virtually as dictator to the industry, and his hostility had arisen from his quick recognition of the fact that, while the Carn Company existed he could never hope to be successful. He was a clever, unscrupulous man, whom few cared to oppose, none to offend.

from the time to the time when the ship was broken up

the company was the same as the company was 22

Yet Big Jim had quietly gone his own way and worsted him so badly that, by the outbreak of war, though still dangerous, he was very far from being dictator. In fact, most of the other shipbreakers were beginning to hope that he was about to be driven from the trade altogether when Big Jim disappointed them by going off to the Q-ships—all his best men with him, except one, his undermanager, who was left in charge of the Carn affairs.

Davis was this undermanager's name. He was a Welshman, a slim, worried-looking man, thin faced, thirty-eight years old, and without an equal in his profession. Once he had had a great reputation for his success in handling Chinese firemen; also for his skilful use of a spanner as a means of persuasion. But the loss of a foot—which loss kept him in the yard during the war—as a result of saving a Chinaman from a steam-filled engine-room, had brought him ashore—to essay with equal success, though without his spanner, the much more difficult task of handling British working-men.

On first acquaintance, few thought him of much account, for although the artificial foot that he was compelled to wear enabled him to walk almost as well as a sound person, he was extremely sensitive about his disability, and therefore backward and diffident in the company of strangers.

The fact, too, that he had been unable to go on active service had been an ill pill for him to swallow. Yet Big Jim could not have entrusted his affairs to a better man. Ships were scarce, the war having given a new lease of life to many vessels which would otherwise have come into the breakers' hands, and Finket, using all his greater personal influence, contrived to make them still scarcer for the Carn Shipbreaking Company. Nevertheless the charge was handed back, well kept. For Finket, however, Davis retained a deep and abiding dislike, which would have been a hate but for the contempt with which it was transfused.

“You will be performing a public service, Mr. Martin,”

he said, in concluding the tale of his struggle, "if you rid the trade of that little swine."

"Maybe. Maybe," said Big Jim.

"Do you mean to do it, sir?" Davis persisted.

"We'll see," said Big Jim; and at once he passed on to another subject.

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Knowing well how futile it would be, Davis did not try to discuss the matter again; and even though, during the busy months for shipbreakers and salvors that followed the close of hostilities, fresh instances of Finket's enmity revealed themselves nearly every day, he still held his peace. But his dislike of the man grew. On the rare occasions of their meeting he was as rude to him as possible. When, therefore, no other person than Finket himself was ushered, smiling and affable, into his office one morning, he could hardly believe his eyes; involuntarily he screwed them up to make sure that he was not dreaming.

"You?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Mr. Davies," said Finket, beaming, but very uncertain whether or not to hold out his hand. "You pretty well, eh?" he continued, as Davis still sat staring at him.

"Of all the blooming cheek," Davis murmured, and rang up Big Jim. "Here's Finket, sir," he said.

"Finket?"—the receiver buzzed with Big Jim's surprise—"I don't want to see him."

"Mr. Martin doesn't want to see you," Davis transmitted.

"Oh-h, but he must," protested Finket. "My business is very important."

"Says his business is very important, sir," 'phoned Davis.

"Then tell him to wait," came the reply.

"Mr. Martin says he will see you if you like to wait long enough, Mr. Finket. You will find a chair outside in the waiting——"

"No! no!" bellowed Big Jim, to whom the telephone had carried the undermanager's rendering of his message. "Keep him with you. I won't have him corrupting the clerks."

The rooms adjoined each other, and were furnished with a connecting door that barely sufficed to smother the sound of ordinary conversation. Big Jim's raised tones carried clear through. Yet Davis faithfully repeated his version—"Mr. Martin won't have you corrupting our clerks. You had better find a seat here."

Finket found a chair and sat down, and beamed himself into complacency. As well served one with such a name, a Hebrew had interfered with his family tree; and though far from being a full-blooded Jew, he had all the grosser, and none of the finer, characteristics of that race. He was small, fat, heavy-featured, and glossy. His boots were of very soft leather, and made a padding sound when he walked. His raiment was showy. He wore many accessories. Hardly had he been settled down a minute, when he was proffering—between fingers, three of which were jewelled—a massive gold cigar-case to Davis.

"Have a smoke, Mr. Davies," he said.

"Go on, Mr. Davies. Do!" he urged, as the undermanager barely glanced up at him from his work. "They cost half-a-crown. Take two."

"That settles it," remarked Davis drily. "Could never forgive myself for smoking half-a-crown. No, thank you, Mr. Finket."

Finket pocketed his case and said no more during the half hour that Big Jim kept him waiting. He sat perfectly still, patient as the East when biding its time or facing the inevitable. He had come prepared for the treatment he was receiving; prepared also to make no complaint, so long as any chance remained of getting

what he wanted: Big Jim's bell rang. He rose, and stood waiting for Davis to stir.

"Just let yourself in through that door," said the undermanager without lifting his gaze.

"Thank you, Mr. Davies," said Finket meekly, and padded his way into Big Jim's room.

Davis flung a baneful glance after him.

"Oh, you Holy Moses," he growled as the connecting door closed. "I wonder what you are after."

The near presence of his enemy distracted his thoughts and prevented him from working; he got up at last and went out into the yard to attend to some matter there. When he returned the visitor had departed. On the edge of his desk sat Big Jim, puffing away at one of Finket's cigars: he had none of his undermanager's ways of showing his dislike of a man.

"Got six of them," he announced triumphantly. "Half-a-crown apiece, too. Didn't you take any? Gad! that explains the look of agony on his face when I accepted his offer. You gave him wrong ideas of this office. Have one now. Don't be so infernally punctilious. We are going to take much more than cigars off Mr. Finket."

"That's the best bit of news I've heard for a long time," said Davis, selecting his smoke and snipping the end off with a finger nail. "Here's to his damnation. What does he want?"

"You know that big lot of old ships that the Government want to sell in a bunch to save the bother of splitting?"

Davis nodded, and Big Jim continued:

"Finket is forming a syndicate on the quiet to take them on, and he'll get them at his own price and make a fortune. Do you see? There won't be any competition—the lot is too big; and all the other firms are sitting tight till the Government splits."

"And he came to you to square the only man likely to put up any opposition?" burst out Davis. "That's

his game, is it? Might I ask what inducement he is offering you to join?"

"A share in the deal with the others, and something over that the others are not to know about. You know his delicate way of suggesting a dirty bit of business—you get his meaning, and nothing else. Nothing you can turn over and say he said it. But I gathered we could have two tenders—one for the Government and one for the syndicate—the two of us to share the difference. Poor Finket! I think he is pretty hard pressed just now."

"Poor Finket?" repeated Davis wrathfully. "What d'ye mean to do, sir?"

"Burst him," Big Jim said coolly.

"Thank Heaven you have seen the need for that at last," Davis muttered. "He is the dirtiest, filthiest——"

"Far dirtier than even you think, Davis," interrupted Big Jim. "There's a wee firm across the water——"

"That you gave that old cruiser to," said Davis, interrupting in turn. "I know, sir. I tracked it through the books. Was Finket worrying them?"

"Ay! I just gave them a leg up in time. And since ever I saw his game there, I've had him in line. Now I've good reason for thinking that if he does not pull off this deal he is done. He *won't* pull off this deal. I'll see that he doesn't . . . I'm away to look at these ships. Won't be back for a week. You will have him nosing around before then. Tell him what you like, but don't frighten him away. G'bye."

Finket came nosing around three days after Big Jim had gone. Davis heard him announced, heard him pad up almost to his elbow as he worked hard at his desk, but pretended not to be aware of his presence. Finket leaned over his shoulder and beamed into his face.

"Is Mr. Davies too busy to receive his friends?" he asked playfully; and the undermanager was reminded of a purring, rubbing cat.

"Hello, Finket," he said indifferently. "Mr. Martin is away."

"Oh-h," sighed Finket. "Where's he gone? Don't you know? No? Don't he tell you nothing?"

"Not anything I could tell you, Finket."

"Oh-h . . . Well—I will come back another day."

Finket wandered irresolutely to the door. Then he retraced his steps and laid a heavy gold cigar-case in front of Davis.

"What do you think of that?" he asked. "Fine? Eh? Cost seventy pound."

"Jove, you believe in doing yourself well, Finket," remarked Davis, picking up the case and beginning to examine it. "I thought you had got one of these already."

"That's for you," murmured Finket.

"For me? Whatever for?"

Finket beamed on the undermanager.

"Do you mean to say," asked Davis, "that you are giving me this?—Oh!" He pressed the bell. The clerk entered. "Here, Lachie," he said to him. "You're a good boy, and I've always wanted to give you something. Here's a present for you."

"Oh-h, Mr. Davies," sighed Finket.

The clerk stared in amazement at the case, and from one to the other of them.

"Take the damn thing away," Davis snapped. "If you don't want it, pitch it in the sea. . . . Now, Finket," he said, when the still mystified clerk had departed. "If you ever try to give me a backhander again, I'll break your blooming neck. You get out through that door. Quick!"

Finket went; in a minute or two Davis followed him. There he was in the outer office, endeavouring to explain to the clerk that the gift of the cigar-case was a joke—that the case had now to be returned.

"Hello, Finket," called Davis.

Finket padded away.

Davis told his chief of the incident immediately the latter returned.

"Ay," said Big Jim. "He would do a lot to keep on good terms with this firm just now. But that attempt to recover his case is not due to the Jew in him, as you seem to think. It's the desperate meanness of the spending man who has suddenly found himself getting hard-up. He would never have done that a year ago. He was all the other way—the sort of man who gave a porter three times the usual tip out of pure vanity. Show him straight in when he comes. He'll be here to-day."

Finket did not wait to be shown in when he came. Without a glance or word for Davis, he lumbered straight across to the connecting door and let himself through. Immediately his voice rose in a screech, angry, insistent, threatening. Davis half rose, the intention formed to interfere. But the screeching stopped. Heavy steps sounded towards the connecting door. It was hurled open, and through the entrance hurtled Finket, flung bodily from the strong arms of Big Jim Martin.

His body flattened against the opposite wall, rebounded, recovered its balance; he darted towards the exit. But with the door opened and his escape assured, he turned and stared back at his assailant. Later, Davis had cause to remember that stare. All the evil of which the man was capable was given expression in it.

It fascinated him, and held his gaze, even after Finket's departing footfalls had sounded out into the yard; the whole happening had taken place so quickly; it seemed only a moment ago that Finket had been entering his room. But at length he looked round to see what his chief was doing. Framed in the connecting doorway, Big Jim stood busy straightening out loose strands of his beard and pushing them back into the parent masses over his shoulders.

"He gripped me by the beard," he growled, becoming aware of the undermanager's wondering stare. "Gripped it, hung on to it, and pulled. Gad!"—there was as

much astonishment in his voice as anger—"I know now what it means to be bearded in one's own den."

"Whatever was the matter, sir?" enquired Davis.

Big Jim completed the arranging of his beard before replying.

"We differed," he said.

Then he backed into his room and closed the door.

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During the next six days he was seldom in the office, and so short were his visits, so immersed did he seem in his thoughts, that Davis did not get an opportunity to question him further. Whether or not he would have availed himself of the opportunity, even if it had presented itself, was doubtful, as he stood in no little awe of his chief, and Big Jim was never very amenable to being questioned. But when next week saw the latter seldom out of the office, and bending over his desk from morning to evening, and the cause of the new preoccupation daily becoming more plain, his anxiety became so great as to force him to break in on his chief's reserve.

"You are surely not thinking of putting in an independent tender, sir?" he enquired, the question disclosing what he had been fearing.

Big Jim raised his head and looked at him.

"We have already two years' work in hand," he hastened to continue; "and though I am all for giving Finket one in the eye, I don't see any sense in buying an additional ten years' supply of ships just to prevent him and his gang getting them."

"Neither do I, Davis," replied Big Jim, letting his gaze fall again on the mass of specifications in front of him. "You needn't worry."

Davis returned to his room, his fears confirmed, and, despite his chief's last remark, his anxiety very greatly increased. The Carn Company had a capital little over

seventy thousand pounds, and though this had been privately subscribed and could easily have been quadrupled by a public issue, to burden such a company with an expenditure—an expenditure likely to be unproductive for a long time to come, moreover—that would amount to at least half a million, seemed to him nothing short of suicidal. And the ships were scattered all round the coast; the cost of concentration and maintenance would be heavy. While a fortune might be made out of them were a sufficient margin allowed, at competitive prices, it was far more likely to be lost. Nevertheless it was his chief's concern; he could say nothing more.

The preparations in the next room at last came to an end, and one afternoon Big Jim came through the connecting doorway, his best slate-blue coat on, his best vest and trousers, the rough leather of his boots polished to its maximum brightness—sure signs that one of his away trips was due.

"There is my tender," he said, laying a folded schedule on the undermanager's desk. "Just look through it. Then I want you to keep it for me."

In silence Davis took up the schedule and glanced at the totals. They were smaller than he had anticipated, but huge enough in themselves, and his brows drew together in a doubtful frown.

"Can you finance this, sir?" he enquired.

"The money is in the bank."

"Very good"—Davis felt inclined to swear, but his sense of loyalty reasserted itself. "I'll start taking on extra hands at once," he said, "and try to get a berth or two cleared for you, sir."

"Yes, do," Big Jim replied. "But keep that tender on you. Don't put it in the safe. I'm going away for a while—don't know when I'll be back. Mind, Davis," he said very earnestly, "Finket would give a lot to see the figures, and I shouldn't be surprised if he tries a shot at getting them. Be as careful as you jolly well can. I have a feeling that we are in for a very interesting time."

Davis folded up the schedule and placed it in his breast pocket. When his chief had gone, he took a small revolver from his desk and placed it in beside the schedule. Not lightly had Big Jim spoken such a warning.

But in spite of his recognition of the need for personal precautions, a month went by bringing neither his chief's return nor any news of his whereabouts, without causing him the slightest concern about Big Jim. The latter often went away for long periods without either saying where he was going or sending word where he was. It was part of the nature of the man; partly also an effect of his rivals' respect for his buying powers. Whenever they could, they followed him to sales to bid against him—that he should be willing to pay so much being held ample reason for them to pay a little more. And several times the first intimation that Davis had received of him and his activities, was his arrival in one of his purchases off the yard.

But a new and sinister factor appeared in the situation with the entrance into his room one morning of an indignant old lady; a little old lady, bonneted, gamped and clad in the black, lustrous garments that he had always vaguely associated with grandmothers.

"Mrs. Martin!" he exclaimed.

It was Big Jim's mother. He stared at her in dismay.

Mrs. Martin was a very worthy woman who spent most of her time and money in the management and upkeep of a city home for outcast girls; who came only one month in four to stay at Carn, then to coax the paint and tar stains from her son's slate-blue coats, to mend the tears and frayings, and to ensure his keeping at least twelve Sabbaths of the year in the orthodox manner; and for whom Big Jim had the greatest affection and respect. For weeks before she came he would talk of her approaching visit, and once he had bought a new coat and burned the old one as not fit for her to see. Not a single instance could Davis remember of his failing to be at the station

to greet her ; he had often travelled great distances by special boat and train just to be in time. That he was absent now, meant only one thing to the undermanager. Something very serious had happened to delay him.

"Where is James ?" Mrs. Martin asked tartly. "Why was he not at the station ?"

"James ?" repeated Davis, slow to recognise his chief under such a name.

With a gesture of impatience, the old lady swept towards the connecting door, her gamp raised as though about to be brought down on her huge son's shoulders. She had walked from the station ; the streets had been muddy, and this, with the absence of the usual symptoms of filial regard, had served to put her thoroughly out of temper.

"He's away," Davis called after her.

"Away ? *Away !* Mr. Davis—where ?"

Davis flinched under her stare ; he could easily understand his chief's respect for her.

"I don't know," he said meekly. "He has been away for nearly five weeks. I expect he is abroad, and couldn't get back in time."

"Oh, indeed no, Mr. Davis," she snapped. "I saw him only a week ago, and he had no intention then of going abroad."

"Oh," said Davis, greatly relieved. "Where was it you saw him ?" he hastened to enquire.

"At the Home. He came to address the girls at the annual function, and then he went off without giving his address. I have that crow to pluck with him, too."

"And do you know where he went to, Mrs. Martin ?"

"No, I don't," the old lady snapped in reply. "A person called to see him, and they slipped out together. A perfectly dreadful-looking individual. A Mr. Finger, or some ridiculous——"

"Not Finket ?" gasped Davis.

"Finket ! Yes. That was the name."

Davis reached hurriedly for the telephone.

"I don't want to alarm you, Mrs. Martin," he said gravely, his hand on the receiver. "But I think it would be well if we communicated at once with the police. This Mr. Finket had special reasons to be interested in your son's movements just now. Mr. Martin would be here if he were able to come."

He saw the anger go out from her; she came towards him, her hands half outstretched, and rested them on his arm. Such a little old fearful lady she seemed, he regretted the abruptness of his disclosure. But Big Jim's steadfast look was in her eyes, and it did not waver while he told her of all the dealings Finket had had with Big Jim, and of what he feared.

"No. Don't communicate with the police yet," she said when he concluded. "Go and see Finket first. You may be able to find out something, when an enquiry from the police would only put him on his guard. . . . Yes, you must go, Mr. Davis," she added, as he looked at her doubtfully. "I have every confidence in your ability to deal with this man."

The advice seemed sound enough to Davis, yet he felt none too sure of his ability to carry it out successfully. But there was no one else to go, so he went; and Finket gave him a very curious glance as he was ushered in. It was obvious that the man was on his guard. He made no response to a greeting. He sat still and stared, malignant, watchful, almost impudent. Angered, suspicious, yet uncertain, Davis was at a disadvantage from the beginning of the interview.

"You called for Mr. Martin about a week ago at his mother's Home, Mr. Finket?" he began tentatively.

But he received no reply.

"And you went off with him," he continued. "Do you remember where you went?"

"Yes," said Finket.

"Where?"

"A restaurant."

"And after that?"

"After that?" exclaimed Finket in a sudden burst of passion, the reason for which Davis only divined later. "After that?" he repeated. "You try to make a fool of me—eh, Mr. Davies? What's the game—eh? Big Jim didn't tell you he walked out by the back door leaving me to pay the bill—no? Of course he didn't; but he sends you along now to find out—eh? Get out of here. Get out. Get out, I tell you."

He was screeching. Davis looked at him in amazement. The passion seemed real enough, yet he felt that it was only a bluff; and suddenly he saw something that convinced him—something that had sparkled under Finket's chin; that made him make a furious grab at Finket's throat:—Big Jim's diamond stud, which Finket was wearing.

A bevy of clerks dragged him off before he could do any great hurt. Still shouting threats and accusations, he was bundled out of the room and given in charge for assault. A business acquaintance, however, was soon found to stand bail for him. He hurried back to Carn, still furious, yet reproaching himself for making a muddle of the interview, and rather dreading having to confess to Mrs. Martin. But she was not at home. Without waiting to get her authority, he hastened on to the office to communicate with the police: Finket was warned, and their action must be speedy if they were to trap him. And Finket sat waiting him there.

"No more assaults, Mr. Davies," he said, starting warily up out of his chair, one hand bunched in his pocket in a way that told Davis there was a gun there.

The undermanager went to his desk and sat down, too surprised to think of doing anything else. Finket followed him, and sat down on the other side.

"I have withdrawn the charge against you," he announced. "There will be no more trouble with the police."

"Won't there?" said Davis meaningly.

"There won't. At least, I hope to convince you that

it is not worth your while to put the police on my track, and—believe me, Mr. Davies!—they won't find your chief for you." There was a nasty ring of certainty in his voice that impressed Davis in spite of himself. "You think I enticed him away," he continued, "that day I called at his mother's Home?—Read that."

He pushed a letter over the desk. Davis recognised Big Jim's handwriting even before he picked it up. It contained a request for Finket to call for Big Jim at the Home; and the signature was as genuine as the handwriting.

"Well?" Finket queried.

Davis pushed the letter back without remark. Finket chuckled.

"As for the stud," he went on, "I can produce two waiters to swear that they saw him give it to me, and half a dozen who saw him leave me sitting at the table. And every minute of my time after that is labelled with its own particular alibi. And," he added sharply, as Davis rose threateningly from his chair,—“just bear in mind that I have a gun here.”

"You swine," exclaimed Davis. "What do you want?"

"When you were raving in my office," Finket continued coolly, "you mentioned that Mr. Martin had left his tender with you. That was rather a knock-out to me."

"And that tender is going in," interrupted Davis.

"Do you think that is wise, Mr. Davies? . . . Don't you think I could make it worth your while to hand it over to me instead?"

"You mean that in return you will see that Mr. Martin——?"

"Oh-h, Mr. Davies," interrupted Finket with a cunning leer. "I merely offer you three per cent. commission on the deal. Here is my offer, signed and ready;" he produced a slip of paper as he spoke.

"Nevertheless," persisted Davis, "you mean——?"

"I mean you can show that to your friends, the police, and nothing more," and with a dramatic flourish Finket flicked the paper across the desk.

Davis promptly flicked it back. "Get out," he shouted, "and take your offer with you. To-morrow our tender goes in."

He rose furiously to his feet. Fearing violence in spite of his revolver, Finket skipped nimbly to the door.

"It is three days till the last date for tendering," he said, lingering evilly there. "I give you till to-morrow to change your mind. *Then——*"

He slipped swiftly away without finishing his sentence, and Davis, darting after him, could only see the rear of his departing car. But he stood and watched it till it disappeared, and after that, till his telephone bell recalled him. Mrs. Martin was on her way to the office, a maid's voice informed him. In sombre quiet he sat till she came. But his mind was made up as to what should be done—as to what Big Jim would have had him do. Whatever the consequences, the tender must go in, and the police be put in charge of the case immediately.

"It must not," said Mrs. Martin decisively, when he had told her what had occurred and set forth the course which he prescribed. "Mr. Davis!"—her cheeks flushed with some of her first day indignation—"you appear only to be moved by your dislike of being worsted by this man. I cannot allow such a consideration to interfere with the safety of my son. You ought to have come to terms."

"The tender was left in my care," he said dourly, "and I am not going to hand it over to Finket."

"Then give it to me. I will deal personally with the matter. . . . Give it to me. Give it to me at once, sir! Do you realise that I am your director?"

It was as she said. Though hitherto only nominally so, she was both director and *Chairman* of the Company. With as much grace as he could muster he handed her the tender. But as soon as she had gone, he was raging

about the office, frantic at the thought that Finket had won.

Next day he called on her to learn what had happened; she was not at home. He called the following day, and the next and the next, and enquired for her many times over the telephone; but a week had gone by before he was admitted to her presence. He felt furious. No word had come of Big Jim, and his anxiety was growing unbearable. Yet she looked such a pathetic, anxious little woman, he had not the heart to give vent to his wrath.

"He sent me this," she said, holding out a slip of paper to him.

It was Finket's promise to pay commission, the slip that he had rejected—signed and ready; he swore under his breath at the man's cunning.

"That was all," she added sadly. "But oh, Mr. Davis! Every minute since I sent him the tender I have been expecting to hear James' step at the door. What should we do now? I fear I have been deceived."

"What ~~we~~ should have done a week ago, Mrs. Martin," he replied. "Get the police on the job."

"You have my permission," she said meekly.

Without delay he communicated with the police and then with the firm's lawyers. It was the early afternoon. Before evening he was almost mad with rage and chagrin. One of the Carn salvage parties had just come back from a difficult job among the Faroes—and Big Jim had been with them, first on a visit of inspection, then storm-stayed. They had put him ashore that morning, further down the coast.

"I ought to have known," he groaned in agony of spirit. "No man alive could trick him. Oh, God! What a fool I've been."

There had been no kidnapping. Finket had known nothing whatsoever about Big Jim's disappearance—until he, himself, had given the inkling of it in that interview to which Mrs. Martin had sent him. Finket had

simply seized his chance to work a bluff to get the tender, and had succeeded, thanks to Mrs. Martin again. But it was little comfort to him to know that he had been beaten only by the exercise of her directorial powers. His chief had left that tender in his care, warning him specially against Finket, and he had let Finket steal it away. Big Jim would feel like killing him. He felt like killing himself.

4

He was left alone in his misery for a long time. His chief did not come near the office; it seemed more and more ominous to him. Mrs. Martin was away also—"gone to meet her son," as he had been informed,— "and to get her side of the story told first," he had added ungallantly. Then at last Big Jim came.

"Well, Davis?" he said solemnly.

They looked at each other across the undermanager's desk.

"Just read that," said Big Jim, unfolding a newspaper, and indicating a paragraph.

" 'Rumoured absconding of well-known City man,' " read Davis.

"That's Finket," explained Big Jim, beginning to chuckle. "He has bunked with most of the money his blessed syndicate subscribed."

"Then those ships didn't clear him after all?" exclaimed Davis excitedly.

"He didn't get them."

"Didn't get them?"

"No. We've got them. I wired him the news yesterday. That's why he bunked."

"I confess I don't understand," said Davis stiffly.

"Of course you don't," chuckled Big Jim. "You were not meant to. Now, now. Keep your hair on, Davis," he exclaimed, as he saw his undermanager flush with anger.

"D'ye mean to say that this is another plant of yours?" Davis demanded. "Do you mean to say that that tender was a dud?"

"It was," Big Jim interrupted quickly. "Look here, Davis!—I wanted those ships. We could only handle them at our own price, so I had to fix Finket's price for him. That is how I did it. I think you noticed my figure was rather low. He possibly made it lower. But my real tender was higher, just in case of accidents; and I arranged to have it sent in on the last day. Then I pressed a little heavily on my tracks and went North into hiding. The only thing I regretted was giving him my stud. But I thought that would convince you, if nothing else did."

"It did," said Davis.

He felt very angry; and yet he had to admire his chief's cleverness, and to admit that in no better way could Big Jim have brought off the deal.

"I would have appreciated a greater share of your confidence, Mr. Martin," he muttered, still unappeased. "We were rather anxious, you know."

"Man, I couldn't. . . . The plot was too thin. If you had not been transparently sincere, Finket would have tumbled to it and shied. I could trust my mother to bamboozle him, but no——"

"Did *she* know?" gasped Davis.

"Of course she did."

Big Jim roared with laughter at his undermanager's bewilderment. Davis said nothing. He did not know whether to be furious or to laugh also. He had known Mrs. Martin for a long time now, and had never once suspected that she was other than she appeared to be—a little old lady, very busy in good works.

"She's a great little woman," said Big Jim enthusiastically. "and you need not be put out in the least for her taking you in as she did. She has been taking people in all her life. Gad! she has been letting me see what she can do in the way of taking lately. Most of the

profits from this deal are to go to the rebuilding of that darned Home of hers. Think of that! And I meant to treat myself to a new suit of clothes!"

Ruefully he surveyed his garments, his best set once, but now sadly soiled and worn from their sojourn among the salvagers. Davis surveyed them also, and grinned.

"I would do it still, sir," he said slyly.

CHAPTER II

THE WARSHIP "ECKLER"

I

MRS. MARTIN came into the room shortly afterwards and was very, very sweet to Davis. But it was superfluous sweetness. His irritation had already gone. For all his worried, woeful appearance, he had a fairly keen sense of humour, and her behaviour had strongly appealed to it. Finket, besides, was snuffed out : that pleased him greatly. What had pleased him most, however, was his sly remark about Big Jim's clothes. Seldom he was able to fire such a shaft ; seldom he dared. Big Jim was a man with whom no liberties could be taken. Well Davis knew it. Typical of the respect which he showed his employer was the fact that he had never ceased to call him "sir."

This did not mean, however, that their relationship was merely one of employer and employed. A much stronger bond existed between them, a bond very much akin to that between a master-mariner and a mate who have sailed long in each other's company. Indeed it might have been said of the whole Carn headquarter staff that they were a cabin party ; of Big Jim, that he was a very strong captain.

Certainly he was no mere employer to any one of them. He had the highest place in their regard. Rough and fierce though he was at times when angered, always eccentric and mentally elusive, their loyalty to him was

impregnable. They trusted him, and he merited their trust. He was at once their superior, their protector and their friend. No company was better managed; no business ran more smoothly. They would have obeyed him in the face of a crumbling world—and he would have given his orders. And Davis was the greatest loyalist of them all. As much to the example which he set in respect and obedience to Big Jim, as to his efficiency as undermanager—great though this was, was due whatever effect he had in maintaining the excellent state of the firm.

He was merely obeying orders a few days later when he kept the chief of the Carn police waiting in his room for several minutes before communicating with Big Jim. The inspector, however, did not think so, which proved unfortunate for him; for though the part he was destined to play in the case that was opening was only a minor one, his manner of playing it led to his transfer to another and much less desirable police inspectorate; and the ill-temper which brought about his downfall had begun to manifest itself from the moment he discovered that he was being kept waiting, for no other reason, as far as he could see, than the undermanager's disinclination to announce his arrival.

He filled the office with dispeace. He was an overbearing, pompous, officious man. As he had started fidgeting about in his chair, the two policemen who had accompanied him had thought it well to fidget also. Davis, too, was restless. Often he glanced at the clock on the opposite wall. The time was a few minutes to four. Not till those minutes had elapsed did he mean to call Big Jim. The latter was closeted in his room engaged in a very important business deal. Thither he had gone an hour ago. Not before four o'clock, so his instructions had run, was he to be disturbed on any account whatsoever.

From without came the din of the yard—the clangour of hundreds of hammers, the roar of escaping steam blasts,

the thunder of heavy plates and frame sections dumped ashore by the straining cranes. Even here signs of restlessness were not wanting. The roars and the thunders were sounding louder and louder, sure indications to the undermanager's expert ear that the hammerers were not putting forth their wonted effort; and twice he rang up the head foreman and sharply rebuked him. But of the inspector's impatience he took not the slightest notice: the man had come with unusual promptitude, and must pay the penalty of his dilatoriness in answering previous summonses.

Not till the last stroke of four did he rise and open his chief's door.

2

Big Jim was in the act of pushing away the telephone. He looked round at the undermanager with a satisfied grin.

"Just passed off seventy-five per cent. of those ships to the other firms," he announced. "And at a price," he continued triumphantly, "that more than pays for the whole lot. Gad! I didn't think we would do so well. . . . But what's the matter, Davis?"

"The *Eckler* has just come up with the tide, sir," the undermanager hastened to reply. "Twenty minutes ago MacArthur signalled for you and the police to go aboard."

"The police?—What's gone wrong?"

"I don't know, sir. He won't let a boat come near him, and he seems to have dumped all his own. Perry, who went out in the launch, got the idea that his crew want to do a bunk. Looks to me like a case of murder or mutiny. He's flying no quarantine flag."

"Gad!"

Big Jim crushed his old felt hat on his head, drew his

disordered beard into position, and at once hurried off through the connecting doorway.

"I know no more than you do, Inspector," he said shortly, as the inspector rose to greet him, notebook and pencil in hand; and without a backward glance to see whether or not the disgruntled functionary and his subordinates were following, he led the way out into the yard.

There the signs of unrest were unmistakable. Rumour had been busy. On every one of the ten old ships that, in various stages of demolition, lay beached alongside and in the maw of the long landing piers, men had climbed to vantage points, and were gazing seaward to the mooring station where the Company's purchases were wont to wait their turn for beaching. But at Big Jim's appearance the nearer sightseers discreetly descended, and the hammers began to give tongue to their industry once again. Men always worked furiously in his presence. He had the pick of the labour market in his yards,

They went aboard a fast steam launch and were swiftly borne clear of the piers. Broadside on to their course, at anchor in the deep water about a mile from the shore, the *Eckler* lay—one of the warships surrendered by Germany to the Allies, and now sold for breaking; a queenly vessel of twelve thousand tons, built with a grace seldom seen in German, or any, naval design. The day was stormy. Rain squalls covered the greater portions of the estuary, and darkened her long hull in their smother. But just as the launch neared the half-way distance, a burst of sunlight lit her up, and Davis felt his heart thrill at the sight of her. He had been to sea, and knew the love of ships and men. "Somebody must have been proud of her," he murmured involuntarily.

"By Jove, sir!" he exclaimed with scarce a pause. "Do you see her crew? What the deuce can be wrong?"

He had caught sight of a compact little group of men,

standing amidships by the cruiser's rail. Their shore-going kit was on; their bags lay packed at their feet; and between them and the gangway, almost as though it were a precautionary measure, stood their officers.

"They seem in a hurry to leave," said Big Jim. "Gad! Davis, those men are scared stiff. And see MacArthur! He looks as if he had not slept for weeks."

Down the accommodation ladder a man was coming to meet them; a man who stumbled a little as he descended, and kept firm hold of the side rope for support.

"Hulloa, captain!" Big Jim hailed as they made to come alongside. "What's the matter?"

The captain smiled wanly in response, but did not speak. He was a tall, strong, strong-faced man, all of whose strength, however, had obviously been required to pull him through some very severe ordeal. He took their bow rope and made it fast, and, still not having spoken, led the way on deck. Davis, glancing curiously at the crew, saw them stirring uneasily at the sight of the policeman. One man, he noticed, the second engineer, appeared most nervous of all, and his nervousness seemed to increase at his captain's request for a policeman to be left on guard by the gangway.

"I don't want anyone to leave the ship," MacArthur explained in a whisper. "Not till you see what we've got below."

They followed him down into the *Eckler's* great engine-room. . . . In the shadow of a condenser, a man lay dead, stabbed through the small of the back.

"It's Jamieson, the greaser," he said. "It happened four hours ago, just as we made our landfall. We were running short of coal. MacWilliam—that's the second engineer, Inspector—went into the stokehole to see how we stood, leaving him in charge. When he came back he was lying here. We haven't touched him. And it's the third—the third we've lost on the trip.

One overboard, one with his head stove-in in a bunker, and—and *this*."

His voice rose high and broke, hysteria gripping him strongly.

"Come and have a drink, MacArthur," said Big Jim soothingly. "Come along, old man. . . Catch his other arm," he whispered to Davis.

"One moment, Mr. Martin," called the inspector. "I want a little more information from Captain MacArthur before he goes."

"In a little while, Inspector," said Big Jim. "Complete your examination here, and join us in his stateroom. . . Blast you!" he exclaimed angrily, as the inspector seemed bent on persisting. "Can't you see the man's all in?"

MacArthur burst into a peal of laughter. "He looks so funny," he muttered, indicating the abashed inspector, and burst out laughing again.

He was still chuckling when they got him to his stateroom. Davis poured out a stiff glass of whisky, and he drank it off greedily. But a second glass he merely sipped at. The first had taken quick effect on his weakened frame; his colour was back, and with it much of his control.

"I wanted that drink," he exclaimed. "I've been afraid to touch anything for days. I would have drunk bottles and bottles once I started. We've had a hell of a voyage, Mr. Martin. You had better read my log. You'll get everything there as it happened. It's all a jumble to me now. Reckon you'll think a sea-sick novelist has been filling up some of the pages for me."

"Let's hear your yarn, MacArthur. Go on. It will do you good to talk," Big Jim urged him. "What went wrong?"

"Goodness only knows, sir. I don't. Or rather everything went wrong, from the ship to the men, to myself. We've had hellish weather all the way up. She wouldn't steer. There's not been a compass aboard that

I could trust—no two alike two minutes on end. I've had to chance my arm all the time, and I've not slept a minute since my first day out. But that's not been the worst of it. . . . From the first day out we've been afraid. . . ."

He cast a quick glance at them to see how they were taking such a confession, and covered his suspiciousness by sipping at his whisky. Big Jim was nodding, gravely, sympathetically.

"Afraid, Mr. Martin. That's all," he continued. "Just afraid to sleep or to go about alone. Jumping away from our own shadows and that sort of thing, as nervous as kittens at the slightest sound. And without knowing why! That was the worst of it. All we knew was that some hellish *Thing* seemed always to be at our elbow, waiting for the chance to do us in. I'm pretty certain Tait went overboard half paralysed with fear. None of us saw him go. Simply disappeared on an extra dirty night. And Orrock came down a coal-slide in the same way. His mate was with him a minute or two before, and came back to find him lying half buried, with his head smashed. I nearly fell from the bridge myself."

He shuddered at a memory, reached for his glass and nearly drained it. Davis tried to catch his chief's eye for a hint whether or not he should pour out more whisky; but Big Jim was watching his captain.

"You searched the ship, MacArthur?" he asked gently, as the fit passed.

"Every inch of her, sir—and more than once. She's full of compartments, of course, as most big German ships are; but I reckon we unearthed every rat aboard without coming on a trace of anything else. But it didn't help us any. The men have been sleeping on deck abaft the funnels for the last three nights, and you saw how mighty keen they are to go. When we discovered Jamieson this morning, it was all Stewart and I could do to stop them taking to the boats.

"I know it's all bally rot about the Thing," he said,

breaking off and looking at them suspiciously again. "And you must be thinking us a precious set of different kinds of fools. Sitting here with you, and the shore only a mile away, I'm inclined to think so myself. But, my God! Mr. Martin, if you had seen those men's nerves gradually going;—seen them running about the deck like frightened kids, and old Stewart and me after them with rope ends until they cried . . . well! you'd know what we were up against."

"I was mate on the *Strathgathlin*, when much the same thing happened," said Big Jim simply. "But let's hear what you think is the real truth of the matter. Spooks don't use knives, after all."

"No, nor tip sailormen over the side, either," MacArthur continued. "Funny, isn't it, that Tait, Orrock and Jamieson should be such pals, and all gone the same trip? But don't think I'm putting all three to one account. Two are down to the ship. She's a man-killer. The navy people found her so. But the third is among us, and we all know it."

"And you all suspect MacWilliam?" suggested Big Jim.

"All except Stewart," MacArthur admitted artlessly. Then, realising how the admission committed himself, he added quickly—"Perhaps you noticed how the men were keeping away from him when you came aboard, sir?"

"No, I didn't," Big Jim confessed. "I'm only looking at things as they are, and they seem pretty black against him to me, more especially as it is quite well known that he and Jamieson were both after the same girl. Old Stewart's daughter, as a matter of fact, and she had chosen Jamieson."

"Ay. And they'd come to blows about it a day before we sailed on this very voyage," said MacArthur. "Funny, too, isn't it, that Orrock and Tait were the only members of the ship's company present at the quarrel? He was bent on killing Jamieson then, according to what

they said afterwards ; and they had to rough-handle him pretty severely before he stopped. I should have got rid of one or other of them—Jamieson, for preference the precious swine that he was ! And I would have done it, only I didn't want to be hung up, even for a day, and hands were pretty difficult to find."

"Ay, ay. You have nothing to reproach yourself with," Big Jim assured him. "I feel mighty obliged, I can tell you, for your managing things the way you have done. You had better get ashore and home as soon as you can. Just step up and see what that inspector is doing, Davis. I suppose he is on his dignity, and in no hurry to come to see us."

The undermanager left the room, but returned in less than a minute, the inspector behind him.

"He has arrested MacWilliam, sir," he announced with an indicating flick of his thumb over his shoulder.

"I have ordered your second engineer to be detained, Mr. Martin," said the inspector pompously. "My enquiries among the crew fully justify the step, I am sorry to say. I have had him sent ashore."

"Indeed," interrupted Big Jim drily. "You never thought of informing Captain MacArthur first, did you ?"

"There was nothing further I wanted to ask," said the inspector, purposely misunderstanding the thrust.

"Captain MacArthur, I have no doubt, will attend at the station when requested. But I wish to protest very strongly about the conduct of your mate, Mr. Stewart. He was grossly rude to me and my men, almost hindering us in the execution of our duty. If you don't take steps to deal with him, Mr. Martin, I'm afraid he will hear more about it from another quarter."

"Damn you and your other quarter," came an angry voice from the doorway.

They all looked round and saw the mate standing there, a big, gaunt sailorman, a Scotsman, one of the oldest of the firm's employees.

"Why do you no arrest me as well ?" he roared,

striding into the cabin and facing angrily up to the inspector, who shrank from him. "You've putten the handcuffs on an innocent man on the strength o' some tittle-tattle about bad blood atween him and Jamieson. There was far more bad blood atween Jamieson and me. I'd have stuck a knife——"

"That's enough, Stewart," Big Jim interrupted. "You're doing MacWilliam not the slightest bit of good."

"Now, now, Inspector," he continued, as the outraged dignitary began to splutter and fume. "Just let the matter drop. Stewart's nerves are all wrong, and he doesn't know what he's saying. If you are out to make trouble, I warn you I'll make some for you. A man in your position should know how to keep his dignity better. . . . Get everybody ashore, Davis."

The abruptness of his order sent them swiftly out of the stateroom, the inspector with a very civil "Good-day, Mr. Martin." Big Jim acknowledged the salutation with a nod, his only utterance being to MacArthur—a brief but considerate order warning him not to come near the yard until told to do so. When the under-manager returned from the speeding, he still sat in his chair, his gaze resting thoughtfully on the tablecloth, and no word passed between them for some time.

"What do you make of it, Davis?" he at length enquired.

Davis shook his head. "Blessed if I know, sir," he said. "It might even be Stewart?"

"Ay. It might. . . . Well, we had better be going. Get a watchman settled on board. We'll not beach her till next month's high tides. I've got to go up to town on business and may not be back till then, so make all the arrangements on your own. And get the cleverest lawyer you know on MacWilliam's defence. Poor lad! I hope some extenuating circumstances turn up to save him!"

"So you really think he did it, sir?"

"I shouldn't be surprised," Big Jim said sadly.

"Jamieson possibly said something about the girl, just to irritate him—it's the sort of thing he would do, even though she was his own fiancée; and MacWilliam nursed it up for him. Perhaps Stewart heard, and started nursing it up also. You and I have both been to sea, and know what that can lead to when men are cooped up together. They've both been thinking murder. That's the Thing that got on the nerves of the crew. Possibly the one affected the other, only MacWilliam struck first. But come along! This old hooker is giving me the creeps. I actually got the idea while you were away that someone half opened that door. Honest! Rubbish, of course, for I looked outside and the alleyway was empty. Still, it shows how that sort of thing grows on one."

"By Jove!" said Davis. "If you got it so quickly, what about MacArthur?"

"Yes. We must come up with something handsome for him. I reckon no one else could have brought the *Eckler* home. Did you ever see men look more scared than that crew?"

They were up on deck by this time. Davis nodded towards the policemen left aboard by the inspector as he said: "There's one about as bad."

The man was anxiously watching their further progress, obviously not relishing the prospect of being left alone. For the evening was falling, the great silent decks filling with shadows.

"Poor beggar," murmured Big Jim.

"Thomson! Green!" he called. Two men came quickly up the ladder from the launch. "Wait aboard here till the Inspector comes back," he ordered; and with an understanding nod in response to the policeman's glance of gratitude, he led the way overside.

The engineer was the only member of the launch's crew remaining. He signalled him to start and took the tiller. Deftly he sheered the little vessel off from the *Eckler's* side and headed her shoreward. More than once, however, Davis noticed his glance wander astern towards

the big bulk of the cruiser looming darkly against the gathering gloom.

"She looks pretty sinister now, sir, doesn't she?" he remarked, after sending his own glance sternward.

Big Jim nodded. "I'm afraid you may have some difficulty about a watchman," he whispered, dropping his voice so that the engineer could not hear. "You had better pay double wages—whether you have difficulty or no."

"D'ye know!" he continued later. "There's maybe a lot more behind all this than we think. She's had a darned queer history. She was one of the commerce raiders that got home through the blockade, though the Admiralty kept mighty quiet about it. She nearly got sunk at Jutland, and then she finished up as one of the chief ships concerned in the mutiny at Kiel. Who knows what bloody work she has seen—or how it has affected her?"

"Who knows?" the undermanager repeated. "But there's a few who will soon be telling each other all about it," he added sarcastically, pointing towards the yard. "Just look at them."

They were close inshore now, steaming between the piers, with the first of the old ships just ahead of them. The yard clangour had ceased. The day's work was done. But many of the workmen had not yet gone home. They had gathered instead on the pierheads to discuss what they had already heard of the strange happenings, and to wait on in the hope of hearing more.

"Waiting to see the body brought in, I suppose. Curious what interests some people," remarked Big Jim. "But clear them all out, Davis. I'm going to nip off at once. . . . Good-bye."

3

He stepped nimbly ashore the moment the launch grazed the landing-stage, and hurried through the yard to the office; thence his car drove him away on the beginning of his business tour; and, as was wont, the undermanager had no word from him all the time he was away. But the morning of the first high tide saw him enter the office. It was very early. Davis, who had been up most of the night arranging the last details of the *Eckler's* beaching, came sleepily out of his room to greet him. There were signs of more than the usual worry on his face, however, as well as the sleepiness, and Big Jim, who noticed most things, quickly remarked on them.

"You look as if you had a tale to tell, Davis," he said.

"I have," said the undermanager, stressing the words. "Where shall I begin?"

"What about MacWilliam?"

"They'll hang him. Nothing surer," said Davis gloomily. "His knife fitted that wound in Jamieson's back as though it had made it."

"And no extenuating circumstances?"

"Yes. You were right. It was something Jamieson said about Betty Stewart that got his goat. But he won't say what it was—won't let the lawyer so much as hint at it."

"For fear of compromising the girl?—good boy!" exclaimed Big Jim. "Just what I would have expected of him. However, I know the Home Secretary pretty well, so he won't hang, even though they convict him. I wonder what the girl is thinking about it all. Let this be a lesson to you to keep clear of the women, Davis."

"She'd do anything to save him, poor Betty," Davis replied. "It seems she had sent Jamieson packing just before they left to bring up the *Eckler*, and the dirty

swipe, guessing that the place was open for MacWilliam, goes and tries to put him against her, and gets the knife as a result. At least, it looks very like that now."

"Ay, it does," said Big Jim with a sigh. "And what about Stewart? Is he clear?"

"You were wrong there, sir. Stewart didn't know what Jamieson said, or Jamieson wouldn't have lived so long. The old chap hated the sight of him. He was all for MacWilliam. . . . By the way, he is doing sixty days' hard labour. Got clinked for assaulting that darned inspector. Simons seemed to go out of his way to irritate him, and out of pure blurry spite, he is——"

"Working his hardest to get poor MacWilliam hanged?—Damn!"—Big Jim's great fist came crashing down on the table; and though he immediately changed the subject of the conversation, and began asking questions about the *Eckler*, Davis knew that a period had been set to the inspector's days of power.

Point by point they went over the arrangements for the beaching; the place where the warship would strike, her draught, the expected depth of water over the Mussel-back—an obstructive sand-bank off and athwart the piers. Davis was quite content to be switched off his story. Whenever possible he copied his chief's trick of withholding the most interesting information until the last, and there were other things yet to be told about the *Eckler*, apart altogether from the details of her beaching.

"And she has killed another man, sir," he said quietly, when the last such detail had been discussed.

"A fourth! No?" Big Jim looked at him in astonishment.

"Yes. The watchman—old Banks. Simply disappeared. Went overboard in a blow, I think, and in a boose. A fine collection of empty bottles he left behind him. But folks won't hear that it is anything but the ghosts of Tait, Orrock and Jamieson that's done it. They have added Banks' spook to their Chamber of Horrors now. Some drunks pulled out to her for a

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lark, and there he was, looking out of a port-hole. I couldn't get another watchman for any money, so she has had to take her chance unattended for the last fortnight."

"But she is positively uncanny, sir," Davis continued, growing a little excited. "I stuck two hours of darkness on her myself, and simply had to go. MacArthur talked about being afraid after the first day. *Afraid!* What a man. Another hour of her and I'd have been mad. I had a hundred of the hands searching her next day, and though they went about in bunches, some of them looked pretty queer before we were done. Half the town will be out watching us this morning. She's become a mighty interesting old hooker to the natives since you went away."

"You seem to have had a pretty interesting time altogether," said Big Jim. "It strikes me the sooner we get the *Eckler* broken up the better. Once we have her beached, you had better put as many gangs on to her as you can spare from the other jobs. She is much too sinister a packet to keep lingering about the place any longer than we can help. Come along. We'll get aboard."

They left the offices and made their way towards the landing stage. It wanted yet a clear hour before the normal day's work began, nevertheless the yard was already filling with workmen. Davis had spoken truly about the interest being taken in the *Eckler's* beaching. As the launch carried them seaward, more and more disclosing to their view the high ground that rose behind the offices and overlooked the yard, they saw people gathering there thickly, and there were crowds along the shore.

"It will at least do them good to be out in air like this," remarked Big Jim. "What a morning!" he exclaimed, his eyes kindling as he looked around him. "In spite of your tale of woe, Davis, I can't help feeling a bit like a schoolboy setting out for a sail. I've been mooching

round stuffy offices for the last three weeks, and living with stuffy men. It's great to see the sea again."

He rose from his seat and stood head and shoulders in the back draught sweeping over the cabin combings. It whipped off his hat and spun it astern, but despite the notorious fewness of his garments, he let it go without making an effort to recover it. For the spirit of well-being was abroad on both land and sea, caressing the waters in the mists of the morning, splashing the long sweep of the high ground with the glory of the early sun. Even Davis caught the infection and stood up also, filling his lungs with deep approving breaths of the clean, sweet air.

"Smoking my pipe on the mountings. Snuffing the morning cool," Big Jim murmured to him. "Those two lines always go through my head on a morning like this. Great little man, Kipling! Ever noticed his trick of slinging the little ordinary feelings and impressions on to his pages? Nothing too small for him not to give it a line or two. Look at that scar on the *Eckler's* bow, for instance—on the water line. Plumb beneath the hawse-hole. . . . That's the graze of a shell, and he could write pages and pages on it, with every tiny shriek of every tiny atom of steel sounding clear from the others. Read him, Davis, and learn the soul of your trade. Here we are. What a whopper she is."

High above them the *Eckler* was towering, her huge bulk seeming to have grown even greater since the day of her arrival. She was in fact riding a foot or two higher, much having been done to lighten her, everything movable cleared and transported by lighter to the shore.

"Good work, Davis," said Big Jim in acknowledgment. "You must have stripped several hundred tons out of her."

"She could clear the Musselback by a good foot," said Davis confidently. "And that with the flow still another hour to make. If I were you, sir, I'd shove her in now. We can get her as far as we need with the

present water, and there won't be any work done in the yard until we do."

Big Jim nodded in agreement. "We will start at once," he said. "'Morning, MacArthur. Glad to see you looking so well."

Captain MacArthur had come to the side to greet his chief; a very different man from the last occasion of their meeting. He leaned over the rail and grinned down the long rope-ladder at them.

"You've got to climb for it this time, Mr. Martin," he chuckled. "All our fancy flights of stairs have gone ashore with the Davis dump. When do you want us to start? . . . Now? Very good, sir."

By the time they had swarmed up the side he was on the bridge and issuing his orders. A winch waked to life forward as they joined him there; the heavy anchor cable began slowly to groan through the hawse. Three tugs thrashed and churned their way into stations and made fast, one on either quarter, the third astern to help with the steering, the *Eckler* being light and likely to be cranky on her wheel.

Steam was up. The anchor broke above the surface. MacArthur tugged the syren line, and with a defiant bellow the great ship fell gracefully off before the tide. Round she came, the tugs humouring her craftily, checking her swinging head dead on to the yard. Then her own power was unthrottled at the clang of the telegraph bell. To the crash and thud of her half-submerged screws she glided gracefully forward, speedily gathering way.

"The excitement is getting up already," Big Jim remarked with a smile, as a faint cheer came from the shore. "But there is something pathetic in this," he added, his smile giving way to a sober expression. "If I were a German I would weep."

He pointed to the yard towards which they were steaming swiftly. Wider and wider across their course the maw of the piers was opening. Davis saw the dead ships within it, and felt a twinge of contemptuous pity

at the thought of the mighty hopes which had sent the *Eckler* forth—to such an end.

The next instant he saw the bows lift up suddenly. There was a terrific shock. He was flung heavily against the rail, and felt a mighty quiver pass through the ship. As from a long distance away he heard Big Jim exclaim: “Oh, hell! We’re stuck.”

4

Over the rail he hung, half stunned, staring stupidly down at the men sprawling about the decks below. He heard his chief roar out for someone to stop the engines, heard him rush to carry out his own instructions. Loud cries of alarm were rising from starboard. Recovering his scattered senses, he ran to the end of the bridge and looked overside. There, beneath him, the starboard tug was turning turtle.

She had parted her fastenings when the *Eckler* struck, and had gone lurching sideways. He saw her keel coming up to the surface—up, up, until the water was laving from it; there it stopped. “Oh, Lord!” he muttered, as it lay hesitating. Then he drew a long breath of relief as he noticed it sinking again. Slowly the tug righted. A frightened skipper came out of the wheelhouse and stared up at him.

“Yes. We’re all right here,” the man called in reply to his query. “But, Mother of God, Mr. Davis! what kind of a ship is it ye’ve gotten? You’re plumb on the Musselback, and a minute ago I’d have sworn you could have cleared her easy.”

“Ay. This is your foot of water, Davis,” came Big Jim’s angry hail.

He turned to find his chief surveying him grimly; behind him MacArthur swabbed nervously at a gashed forehead, and he felt a sudden access of nervousness

But before he had finished, Davis had sprung towards the rope-ladder, calling to him to follow.

"She's sinking," he yelled.

With a shout of alarm, MacArthur sprang after him. High above his head though the *Eckler's* side still towered, it had obviously shrunk several feet, and was going on shrinking. The crew took up the cry, and came crowding up the tug's paddlebox. But the appearance of Big Jim himself at the rail stilled the incipient turmoil. They fell back abashed. Very coolly he clambered down into their midst and ordered the tug's skipper to put off and stand by.

"I've scuttled her," he said briefly. "Don't ask me any questions. Just wait and see."

Foot by foot the *Eckler* sank lower. For so big a ship she filled quickly, and soon her decks were below the level of the paddleboxes. There she hung waterlogged for a little while. Then a swell of water forward took her head down, her forefoot touched bottom; slowly her stern sank until she rested on an even keel on the seabed, her hull completely submerged, only the rail and superstructure above the surface.

"Now, MacArthur. Get the hands aboard and search her," Big Jim ordered.

But the search met with no result, carefully though it was conducted.

"Did you expect to find anything, sir?" Davis ventured to ask him.

"No. I only wanted to make sure that there was nothing above water. I'll bet my last dollar, though," he added emphatically, "that there's something, or rather, *somebody* below. Somebody who has been responsible for all the murders aboard her. You pumped out those tanks all right," he said, turning to the engineer. "They were flooded after Davis and I came aboard. You remember that shell graze on the waterline, Davis? Well, it was a good foot under water when I had a look at her after she went aground—and she had run her nose well up the bank, too."

"I knew it! I knew we had someone else aboard, sir!" exclaimed MacArthur. "The feeling was far too real. Good heavens! He might have done us all in, as well as——Oh, bully! this will clear MacWilliam."

"Yes. It will," said Big Jim. "That is, if I am right. You and Davis could not find anything, remember. But the water will find him, if he is there."

"You should have had one of us with you, sir," remarked Davis gravely. "The dirty swine might have gone for you when you were down there alone."

"I was on my guard," Big Jim assured him. "I wish he had tried. Now, get ashore," he continued. "Nothing more can be done till low tide, and probably not much then. I expect we'll have to lift her—perhaps break her, before discovering anything. Whoever he is, he must have found a good hiding-place. . . ."

But at low tide the water had dropped more than ten feet round the *Eckler*, and they came on the stranger in the alleyway, not far from MacArthur's old stateroom. He lay on his back, a terribly ill-kempt, emaciated figure—a madman; even in death his eyes glared up at them, though the lips were formed in a smile. And he wore the uniform of a captain of the German navy.

Big Jim dropped sorrowfully on his knees by his side.

"If only I had suspected this!" he murmured. "Poor devil. All he wanted was to be left alone with his ship. You said someone must have been proud of her, Davis. Here he is. Poor, poor devil."

Bending down, he gently drew his handkerchief over the dead man's face.

CHAPTER III

OTTO GUILTER—BUCCANEER

I

WITHIN a week MacWilliam was free. Within a month he and Betty Stewart were married. The *Eckler* was raised, beached, and broken. In a remarkably short space of time, long even before the breakers had cleared her superstructure, the story was almost forgotten. But in the memory of Davis, at least, it continued to live, if only for one scene—that, in the alleyway of the cruiser, when Big Jim knelt in sorrow by the side of the man he had drowned. There he had been able to glimpse something of the quickness and depth of his chief's understanding and sympathy. MacArthur and he, until Big Jim had spoken, had seen in the German only the drowned murderer of their comrades ; Big Jim had seen, and made them see, only a true son of the sea.

Not often did he get such a revelation of his chief's inner self. For over ten years he had served him, and, for many years before, he had been familiar with his name, and if anyone could be said to know Big Jim Martin that man should assuredly have been he ; yet he would have been the first to admit that *know* was the wrong word. Big Jim's psychology was beyond him : he was an enigma, a man of surprise.

What surprised Davis most, whenever he thought of the matter, was that such a man should ever have settled down at Carn. Certainly Big Jim had made a success

of his life from a worldly point of view, but from his point of view he had failed—had allowed himself to fail: he had been the greatest Captain of the Seas, the greatest filibuster of modern times; he had led successful revolutions, suppressed others, helped men to kingships and presidencies in the rougher parts of the world, made tottering dynasties and constitutions secure—and for himself gained but a name, and founded the Carn Ship-breaking & Salvage Company.

Deliberately at some point in his career he must have braked his ambition and turned aside from his destined path. Not till the *Alabama* affair was Davis able even to guess what had happened. But men had told him of a time before the era of the slate-blue coats and ministerial trousers, when, than his chief no more gallant and gay commander was sailing the seas, and he knew that something *had* happened—what, they had not told him; they could not tell him. For Big Jim had always been regarded as a leader, a man apart from his fellows, known of many, but knowing few; besides, for long periods he had been off the seas. Yet but for that secret blight which had fallen on his soul, Davis knew that he would have carved out for himself a great career, perhaps changed the history of a continent. There was nothing on which he had set his heart that his chief could not have achieved.

In an earlier age he would have been a paladin, a prince adventurer,—he had all the qualities and the greatness of quality for high enterprise,—perhaps a pirate: there was a ruthlessness in his nature that at times affrighted Davis, so calmly did it display itself. But for the tenderness, the generosity, the chivalry that the undermanager knew were there also, he could easily have pictured his chief decreeing the sack of cities and the slaughter of thousands of foes.

Perhaps it was just as well that that scene aboard the *Eckler* continued to live in his memory as testimony to his chief's softer side. Not long afterwards an affair

took place that gave testimony of a very different kind. . . . A man there was who did Big Jim wrong. Fate brought them together in the strangest of ways. Big Jim dealt with him.

Fate certainly stood by Big Jim's shoulder when he sat down with Davis to settle which ships of the Government lot they should keep, and which they should sell. Three-fourths were to be disposed of—and were disposed of—to the other shipbreaking firms. Vessel by vessel they ticked them off on the schedules. At last it came to choosing between a cruiser and four submarines.

"We've had no submarines so far, Davis," he said, glancing enquiringly at his undermanager.

"They are kittle craft for us to handle, sir," Davis remarked. "It's difficult to find a market for their fittings and equipment sometimes, and it's a sheer heart-break to let the stuff go at scrap prices."

"Ay."

"Besides, if we take the cruiser it means only one berth instead of four, and we can put any number of men on to her at once."

"Ay. That's so, Davis."

Big Jim's pencil had been hovering over the cruiser's name; it hovered nearer, then suddenly he changed his intention and put four bold pencil marks in the margin further down the page.

"We'll take the subs," he said. "I can't help feeling interested in that sort of craft, and honestly—it will be a real pleasure to me to think I'm smashing up a few."

"Very good, sir," Davis agreed, remembering what a mighty submarine hunter his chief had been in the war. "And it won't make any great difference. For that matter, we can easily break them alongside some of the other ships, if we can't get room by the piers."

"Right," said Big Jim.

So in due time the submarines were moored off the yard. Davis soon discovered that others were interested

in them, far more interested, apparently, than his chief had been. A day after their arrival on the mooring station the representative of those others called on him. He looked up from his desk and took an instant dislike to his visitor.

2

Don Jose Sebastian—so the clerk had announced him—came bowing into the room and held out his hand. He was a broad-shouldered, tight-hipped man of medium height, swarthy, handsome and graceful enough to be a Spaniard; but Davis had sailed too many seas and known too many men not to recognise his type.

“Deep-sea tough,” he said under his breath; and nodding to the outstretched hand, he motioned him to the chair on the other side of the desk.

“What can I do for you, mister?” he asked.

The Don smiled blandly. He too had recognised the type of man in front of him, and was bent on being as conciliatory as possible.

“Are you Mr. Martin, the managing director?” he asked.

“I’m not,” said Davis.

“Then would you be so kind as to find out whether he can spare me a few minutes, Mr.—Mr.——?”

“Davis,” said the undermanager ungraciously.

“Mr. Davis,” repeated the Don, with a polite little bow over the name.

His glance swept downward with the bow, leaving the undermanager’s face for an instant; and in that instant Davis saw a strange thing happen, the first of two strange happenings that warned him he was faced with no ordinary interview.

Directly opposite him was the door connecting his room with that of his chief. Without a sound it suddenly opened and Big Jim stared in at the visitor,

an incredulous look on his face, a look that changed into one of astonishment, hate and exultation; then the door closed and hid him from view.

So swift and unexpected was it, Davis nearly cried out in surprise. But he had wit enough to topple a ledger off the desk to the floor and to dive after it in order to hide his amazement. When he raised himself again the second strange happening was taking place. . . . The Don had twisted round in his chair, his face turned to the connecting door, his hand gone to his hip pocket; and the fingers were half closed on the protruding butt of a revolver.

"Here! What's the matter, mister?" Davis exclaimed, reaching swiftly into the drawer in front of him for his own revolver.

But the weapon was not needed. The Don turned round at the call, and gazed at him apologetically.

"A thousand apologies," he murmured. "My dear sir, I do not know what to say. You will think me very stupid, but I turned round just now fully expecting to see someone at that door. Someone—really! I am ashamed to confess it—someone about to shoot me. You know the prickly sensation at the back of the neck that often warns men like you and I of danger? I see you do, and I am pardoned."

Again he made his graceful little bow. But Davis noticed that he was perspiring, and that a yellow tinge had crept into his swarthiness.

"There *was* no one at that door, Mr. Davis?" he asked suddenly.

"Of course not," said Davis. . . . "Visitors are not shot in British offices," he added, feeling that his denial had scarcely been convincing enough.

His grip was still on the revolver in the drawer. What to do he scarcely knew. His chief's past, as he had long known, was one out of which many enmities might well arise; it had flashed into his mind that here was a man come with hostile intent against him. But if so, then

Big Jim was warned, and his counter would assuredly be quick and all-satisfying. He could only wait for it to be made.

"Will you kindly state what your business is?" he asked.

B-r-r-r-! went the telephone bell before the Don could answer him, and with a hasty "Excuse me," he grabbed at the instrument.

"Hello! . . . Mr. Renwick, of Renwick & Sons, speaking. Are you Carn?" came Big Jim's voice, by the sound of it from one of the telephones outside the offices.

"Carn speaking. Good afternoon, Mr. Renwick," he replied glibly. "Mr. Martin is out just now," he continued, in reply to a murmur of approval. "Can I do anything for you? Davis speaking."

"Yes, you can." Big Jim's voice sounded very earnest. "I had to clear out just now. I could not trust myself to remain. Find out all you can about that darned dago with you. Fix him for an appointment tomorrow, and if he seems shy about it, 'phone me at once. I'm at the gatehouse. Got that?"

"Very good, Mr. Renwick. I'll see to it. Goodbye," said Davis, gravely replacing the instrument.

As he did so he glanced quickly at the Don and caught a look of both suspicion and annoyance on his face; he had felt the man watching him intently.

"Well, Mr. Sebastian?" he enquired.

"I hear you say Mr. Martin is out," the Don snapped at him. "Yet outside I was told that he was in."

"The clerk probably meant——" began Davis.

"It was not the clerk," the Don interrupted; and Davis stiffened. "It was the gate-man. I asked specially before coming in, for my business was not with inferiors, and he told me that Mr. Martin had just arrived a few minutes. Yet now you say he is out. I do not understand. My business is important. I will not be put off. I insist on seeing him."

He stared insolently across the desk, his urbanity gone, his manner plainly indicating what treatment he was accustomed to mete out to those who dared to cross him. Yet as Davis reached forward to ring for the clerk, the insolence instantly dropped from him.

"No, no, no, Mr. Davis," he said deprecatingly. "There is no need to have me shown out. I spoke in haste. Accept, I beg you, my humblest apologies. It is merely that I do not know your British customs and ways."

"That is quite evident, mister," said Davis coldly.

"I fear it is," the Don agreed, though his eye had glinted for a moment. "Might I ask," he continued, "when Mr. Martin is likely to return?"

"Possibly not for a month. If your business is sufficiently important I can recall him. But I wish you would hurry up and tell me what it is."

"Ah, but that is not so easy," the Don answered. "May I ask first that you will treat what I say in strictest confidence?"

"Absolutely."

"It is very necessary. . . . I have friends, Mr. Davis."

"If you mean," snapped Davis, "that those friends of yours are mighty handy with a gun, then you had better understand that there are several men about this office just as handy."

The Don bowed. "So I was told," he said courteously. "That, in fact, was why I came here. My proposal is bound to appeal to such men as you speak of. Know, my dear sir, that I represent Don Hernandez, exiled President of—need I say, Mr. Davis? We are gathering forces for a counter-revolution. We need your help."

"Mr. Martin is done with those days," said Davis, smiling a little. "Your South American Republics are best left alone."

"No, no. You mistake me. It is not personal help

that we seek, though we should be glad of it. It is what you can give us. Your firm has lately bought four German submarines from your Government. Is it not so? And of these, the U.Z.72 is perhaps in the best——”

“It’s no good, mister,” Davis interrupted. “Those submarines were bought on a breaking contract, and we could only sell on similar terms. Mr. Martin would simply not consider it. I cannot recall him to deal with such a matter.”

“Even if we offer fifteen—no, twenty thousand pounds? Nearly five times—am I not right—what the U.Z.72 cost you to buy?”

“It makes no difference.”

“Twenty-five thousand, then? . . . Stop! Do not shake your head. We are wealthy. Thirty thousand? . . . And perhaps a little more, a very little something for yourself, eh? What you say?”

He smirked across the desk at Davis, who nearly flung the ink-bottle at him, his fingers happening to be playing with it at the time.

“We can’t have anything to do with filibustering, Mr. Sebastian,” he said shortly. “Do you realise what a risk you are asking us to run?”

“But I do not see it. You merely equip the boat with the necessary stores. Even that is superfluous if you choose your watchman with discretion. I can bring a trained crew. We slip away in the night. We disappear. Who is to know what has happened? She may have been stolen. She may have broken away. She may—Mr. Davis! I will offer *fifty thousand pounds*.”

He had been growing excited as he spoke, twisting his body about and gesticulating, rattling out his sentences in short, sharp bursts of words. Yet he made his offer impressively enough, his voice grown husky and strained, and he leaned back in his chair, breathing heavily, but collected, on his face a certain dourness as of a man fully

conscious of the immensity of an undertaking, conscious also of his will and power to carry it out.

Davis leaned back also and, under a guise of considering the offer, wondered what was behind it. The Don had lied to him—he had no doubt of that; the bid was too high. Less than half expended in bribes would have worked a bloodless revolution in that republic. Davis knew its people well. Why, then, had such a figure been offered for the U.Z.72? A dozen of her like could have been bought for the money, were the market only chosen discreetly.

Some big plot was on foot, some daring enterprise. Of that he felt certain. But there was nothing more to be learned from the Don, whose appearance indicated that he was a little uneasy about what he had already said. Big Jim knew something, however. Filled with an eagerness to hear what it was and to communicate his own news, he brought the interview abruptly to an end.

“I will get in touch with Mr. Martin,” he said. “Your offer is one which we cannot afford to ignore. Can you call at this time to-morrow?”

“And Mr. Martin will be here?”

“Either that, or I will have definite word for you.”

“I will come,” said the Don, and bowing, he left the room, not waiting for the clerk to escort him.

3

Several minutes afterwards, Big Jim entered. Davis had been awaiting him impatiently, expectant of much; and now he felt disappointed. Never had he seen Big Jim more unperturbed. Just what he might have expected, he admitted; his chief had often plunged him into the midst of queer and thrilling circumstances, and always taken his own way and own time to make their significance plain. Therefore he told what had passed

at the interview, emphasising nothing, and making no inferences; and he was heard in silence till the end.

"What do you make of it, sir?" he then enquired, as Big Jim still seemed disinclined to talk.

"What's her history?" asked Big Jim.

"The U.Z.72, sir? Nothing very startling. She is one of their late Z-boats. Got caught in a net in the Channel and captured undamaged. Her commander seems to have been a very decent chap. Picked up the crew of a mined trawler and transferred them to another, and did other things like that. He was interned with the crew, and the sub used as some kind of a decoy ship."

"And what do you think she is wanted for now?"

"Don't know, sir." Davis fidgeted impatiently. He wanted to be putting questions himself, but dared not do so unencouraged. "He might be going to use her for piracy," he suggested.

"Possibly. But fifty thousand pounds seems a lot to pay for the privilege. Gad!" Big Jim exclaimed.

"I wonder where he got it."

"You know him, sir?"

"Yes, I know him, Davis. He is one of the two men that I wanted to kill with my own hands, and I thought him dead."

The words were spoken so calmly, that, for an instant, Davis failed to grasp their meaning. When he did so, understanding came to him with the force of an electric shock. He sat up and gaped.

"By Jove, sir," he murmured. "By Jove, sir."

"Ay. He cost me my brother," Big Jim continued, speaking just as calmly, but his big shoulders hunched a little; he kept his gaze fixed on the floor. "He was on his way home with his wife to serve in the war. They were aboard a small South American coaster. A submarine stopped and boarded her. And Dave shot his wife before being shot himself. The darned dagoes made

no sort of show to save them. They were only a pair of Britishers. What did it matter? I've met most of them since. . . . That was your Don Sebastian, Davis. What do you think of him now?"

"But—but, sir! I don't understand. The man's a Spaniard?"

"Is he? Yes, I have heard people put the colour of his eyes down to the best Visi-Goth blood, but there's a nearer strain than that in him. He was the brat of a German woman by a dago father. He is Otto Guilter."

"Not Guilter of the U.Z.64, sir?"

"Yes."

"The *pirate*?"

"The pirate. . . . The man who took advantage of his country trusting him with a submarine to start playing for his own hand in a way that Kidd, Roberts, Blackbeard, and those other old beauties never equalled, nor thought of equalling. His own Government were horrified when they heard."

"But, good heavens, sir! Guilter was caught and sunk in the Bay. I know a man who was there."

"In circumstances which the German Government described as atrocious until we published a few of his crimes, and then they were sorry they spoke! Quite so. Nevertheless, he must have escaped, even though certain honest merchant toughs got the name of popping him down their funnel. That was Otto Guilter sitting in this room half an hour ago. How he came to be here, and why, I don't know. But it was him."

"And I sat opposite him!" said Davis. "If only I had known."

He stared across the desk, his eyes focussed hardly on the point where the Don had been sitting. After a while he said:

"What d'ye mean to do, sir?"

"See him to-morrow and act on any chance he gives," said Big Jim. "He doesn't know me. At least, I don't think so. He came on the seas since my time. I'll get

him, some way or other. Meanwhile I want to see those submarines. I haven't seen them yet. Are you coming?"

He rose as he spoke, and moved towards the door. Davis followed him—out of the offices into the yard, and through it towards the beach where the old ships lay, the breaking gangs on each of them, busy as ants on a carcass and to much the same end; and then along one of the twin piers to the landing stage where were moored the Company's launches and tenders. The yard was unusually busy—the result of Big Jim's heavy buying. There was much to attract the eye of an engineer. But Davis noticed nothing; he was scarcely conscious of making the journey, so deeply had his mind been stirred by Big Jim's story, so greatly was his attention absorbed by the ideas and memories that it had aroused.

Even when they were embarked and fast approaching the dilapidated fleet that his chief had collected for breaking, his vision included only the submarines and one other—hunters and hunted—a broken-backed tramp, new rescued from the shallows where a torpedo had sent her.

She swung abreast, but beyond the second U-boat, a sorry symbol of the war they had waged. They were moored in line ahead, the nearest craft to the shore. An easterly haze had crept over the estuary, blurring their outlines and making their numbers indistinguishable. Like long, low, thin shadows they lay on the surface of a grey sea, the sinister tilt of their bows giving them a queer, sentient look, suggestive, somehow, of thin-lipped, evil men.

So at least thought Davis, as he sat silent in the launch's sternsheets. What new devilry was being planned for one of them, he wondered, and pondered hard over the question. His chief had spoken to him twice before he heard or answered.

"Which is the Z.72?" Big Jim was saying.

And there was a suppressed excitement in his tones,

in his attitude as he stood, his fingers clenched on the top cabin bevelling, that made Davis spring quickly up beside him.

"That one straight ahead, sir," he answered. "The second, between us and the tramp."

"Good God," he heard his chief say in the slightest of whispers; and then again: "Good God."

Some new phase of the mystery had evidently revealed itself; but Big Jim said no more, eagerly though the undermanager gazed at him. A minute or two later they made the submarine. At Davis's signal, the engine was throttled down, and they drifted slowly alongside. After the appearance of slightness that the distance had given her, surprisingly huge she seemed. Like a monolith, the conning tower rose above them. There were markings on its plates; markings that Davis had noticed before; little dents and grazes, close together and numerous.

"Is that corrosion on her tower, sir?" he asked, with the object of drawing his chief into conversation.

Big Jim started out of his absorption, picked up the question from his subconscious memory, and smiled queerly.

"No, that's not corrosion, Davis," he said. "Certainly not the corrosion you mean." He surveyed the whole length of the submarine before adding: "That's the result of machine-gun fire at fairly close range. And I fired the gun."

"Put about," he ordered gruffly, noticing the curious glances of the launch's crew; and he offered no further explanation.

But back in the office, the door shut securely behind them, he turned excitedly to Davis.

"Do you know what she is?" he said. "She is Guilter's old ship."

"Don't look such a disbelieving Jew, man. I'm *certain*," he exclaimed. "I knew her even before seeing that pepper-potting. I've seen him standing on that very tower scarcely much further away than you are from

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me now. It was in the early days of the Q-ships. I went off on an armed launch to examine a curious-looking neutral flying distress signals, and out he came from behind her, gun ready and all, thinking we were a nice, fat, harmless merchantman. Gad! I swept his gun crew into the sea. Was just getting on to him when the blasted gun jambed, and he slipped back behind the neutral and got clear away. I saw his boat a second time, though a devil of a long way off, just after he had played pirate on the *Esmeralda*. You bet your life I'm not mistaken. There's not much about the points of that ship I'm likely to forget."

Davis could only stare at him.

"Don't you see the game he has been playing?" he continued. "His boat was the Z.72 all along."

"And he changed it to Z.64 when he meant to play giddy hell," exclaimed Davis. "By Jove, sir. What a swine."

"Ay. And the poor devil who commanded the real Z.64 got all that should have come to him, in the Bay. Perhaps that wasn't the only number he used. Perhaps most of the dirtiest tricks the Germans played at sea were due to his boat alone. And to think he was captured and brought ashore decently and kept in honoured captivity here so long! He's a cunning devil. . . . By the way! Did he say anything to you about inspecting her?"

"Not a word," answered Davis.

"No. He's too clever for that. But he said he could bring a trained crew, didn't he? . . . I expect it's his old lot. Though how he managed to get them back into this country, it beats me. He must have powerful support somewhere. Not Don Hernandez and his putty set of dagoes, Davis. The great German Jew is on this job."

"But what is it, sir?" interrupted Davis.

"Don't know for certain. Only got an idea, and it is not fit for putting into words yet. I'm off home. I'll

burst if I stay here. Send old Stewart up to me in an hour, and just carry on."

It was useless to question him further, as Davis well knew, and, left alone, he manfully pushed the matter to the back of his mind and settled down to work. An unusually heavy rush of business helped him; all afternoon his telephone bell was incessantly ringing; the darkness was down before he had time to look at the submarine again. But his interest revived overnight, and the morning found him impatiently looking forward to the Don's arrival and wondering continually what Big Jim meant to do. When the Don was at last shown bowing into his room, he maintained his accustomed calm with difficulty; scarcely pausing to reply to his greeting, he ushered him through the connecting doorway.

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Big Jim sat at his desk, stiff and grim, and made no attempt to rise.

"I haven't had time to consider your offer," he said, brusquely cutting short the Don's graceful palaver. "Frankly, I don't like it. But your price is tempting. If you will give me a banker's reference, I will let you know in a week."

"A week," exclaimed the Don, in something like dismay. "My dear sir, I was given to understand that Mr. Martin was accustomed to make up his mind very quickly."

"Then I'm sorry to disappoint you, sir," said Big Jim. "This is a matter that requires careful consideration, and I am not going to rush into it."

"No. . . . Quite. . . . Quite so," murmured the Don, obviously taken aback by the manner of his reception, and not knowing for a moment what to say.

"But a week is a very long time, Mr. Martin," he

continued, recovering himself. "Too long to suit my friends, I am afraid. Much depends on whether we get your submarine quickly. The time for our coup is very near. If my countrymen rise and we are not ready to cover a landing of our forces, there will be much slaughter, and more oppression——"

"And I don't care a tinker's cuss if there is," interrupted Big Jim.

Even Davis started at the rudeness of his tone. It seemed as though the Don were going to draw his revolver. Was that his chief's aim?—to get a chance to shoot, he wondered. But again that quick re-assumption of urbanity took place. Watching it as an outsider, Davis could not help admiring the self-control that it portrayed.

"Pardon my impatience, Mr. Martin," the Don said politely. "And naturally it is too much to expect you to be distressed on our account. But could you not start making the boat ready for sea, on the chance that you decide to accept my offer? It would save much time. Possibly it might induce my friends to wait, instead of taking the business elsewhere. Better still—could you not allow me to make an inspection? I would then know whether the reports we have had about her condition are trustworthy."

"She is ready for sea," interjected Davis. "She came up under her own power."

"Pardon me, Mr. Davis," said the Don, keeping his glance so pointedly on Big Jim that Davis felt swept out of the way. "Well, Mr. Martin?" Big Jim was hesitating.

"I don't want to attract suspicion," he said doubtfully.

"But surely I must make an inspection some time," the Don persisted.

"Yes, that's true."

But still Big Jim seemed to hesitate.

"Are there any gangs out on the boats just now?" he

asked at last of Davis. "No?—Very well, Don Sebastian. We will go at once."

Davis accompanied them uninvited. The plot was developing and he was anxious to keep in touch with every phase; but what the developments were, he did not know. Big Jim's attitude had puzzled him. Yet somehow the idea entered his mind that his chief had been playing up to this inspection. Therefore he watched the Don carefully from the moment they boarded the U-boat, and soon became aware—and the discovery brought with it a little thrill of excitement—that Big Jim was watching him also, but far more intently, and with far greater care. Thereafter he watched his chief instead.

Surely and quickly the Don examined the instruments and controls in the conning tower. Everything was perfect; he expressed himself as well pleased, and they descended into the hull.

"The officers' quarters, I suppose," he said, pointing to a cramped little row of berths near the foot of the ladder.

Big Jim nodded, and motioned him towards the engine room.

"You had better examine main parts first," he advised. "The light will soon be away."

But he had to be reminded of those berths at the end of the inspection; he walked forgetfully past them and started climbing up to the conning tower.

"Mr. Martin," called the Don apologetically. "There is still something else. Naturally I am interested in what may be my future quarters."

Without waiting on his guide, he made towards the berth and tried to open one of the doors. But it was locked; a fact which surprised Davis, and roused his attention: it suddenly occurred to him that the Don seemed unduly interested in those berths, and his chief too disinterested. Yet watch as he might, he could see nothing of any significance; and back in his office, Big

Jim gone to speed the visitor away, he had to admit that he was even more puzzled than before.

But enlightenment came quickly. Big Jim burst in on him, and hurried him down to the launch again. They sailed to the submarine, and scrambled aboard.

"Is it the berths, sir?" the undermanager enquired eagerly.

"Ay," replied Big Jim. "Hop into the engine-room and bring tools. I want to take out a plate."

He was in the first of the berths, and examining a portion of the steel skirting above the bunk, when Davis returned.

"This is Guilter's old quarters," he explained. "Did you notice how anxious he was to get a squint inside? I was banking on it. I saw you watching him, too. Did you notice anything? Didn't you see his eyes? That's what you should have watched. . . . Gad! he was cool enough, but they simply burned when he looked at *that*." He tapped a portion of the panelling. "That's what he was after, and I guessed it as soon as I recognised this craft. Don't you see?"

"What, sir?" muttered Davis, still mystified.

Then he gave an exclamation of surprise—cleverly let into the panelling at the point indicated by Big Jim, were four rivets, painted over, and concealed to any but a trained eye.

"By Jove, sir! What are those rivets doing there?" he exclaimed. "There's no frame or anything else near them."

"That's just what we want to see," replied Big Jim. "Get the plate out. But be careful. Don't mark it."

Quickly they unfastened the section and lowered it.

"You see," cried Big Jim triumphantly.

On the inside of the plate, and fastened to it by the rivets, was a metal box japanned like a cash-box, about a foot square with a depth of six inches. It was locked. With a deft turn of a spanner Big Jim broke the hasp,

and wrenched up the lid. Davis gave a little cry of wonder. The box was full of precious stones.

"The proceeds of his piracy," said Big Jim grimly. "I suspected it. He might well offer fifty thousand pounds. There's nearly a million's worth there. That came out of the *Esméralda*," he continued, pulling out a great rope of pearls. "It belonged to Mrs. Henry J. Munro, poor woman. It's worth fifty thousand alone. That's her diamond star. And—just look at this!" He dived his fingers in among the gems and raked out five large rubies. "The five Hearts of Burmah. Do you see them, Davis? There's nothing like them in the world."

"Then the *Mahratta* was submarined, after all," Davis exclaimed. "And she was thought to have gone down in a typhoon, with all hands."

"Ay. That old rajah was aboard her with his rubies. I always thought she had been submarined. She was too stout a craft simply to founder. And there's many another stout ship represented here," said Big Jim, gravely regarding the jewels. "Sunk with all hands, every one of them, poor devils. What a cold-blooded hound Guilter is! And he walked into my offices and thought to get off with it all! Gad, he'll learn something different."

He emptied the box of its contents and wrapped them up carefully in some sacking. "Up with her, Davis," he ordered, laying hold of one end of the skirting and raising it. "We must leave everything as we found it. He's a cunning devil, and I don't want to rouse his suspicions too soon. Put some grime over your hammer marks."

When it was done they went ashore, and Big Jim transferred the jewels to his safe. For a little while afterwards, the two men stood looking into the darkened interior, and the jewels blazed out at them, phosphorescent, shimmering, winking evilly.

"By Jove," murmured Davis.

"Five thousand lives, Davis," said Big Jim "That's all it cost Guilter to win them. What they've cost before Heaven only knows, yet the owners will sing hosannas at getting them back. Though it means a sweet commission for us, I feel like chucking them into the sea."

He shut the safe door with a bang, and sat down at his desk. It was a sign of dismissal, but Davis still lingered near him in the hope of hearing what he meant to do.

"I don't know yet what to do about Guilter," he said, looking up again as he sensed the unspoken questions. "I've nothing else to tell you at present. Just send me Stewart. I want to talk to him."

Davis departed, greatly dissatisfied and disappointed. He felt certain that Big Jim could have told him much more had he cared to do so. That Stewart had been summoned was sure evidence to him of this, for Stewart—a dour, old Scot's sailorman, once a master now a mate, his certificate having been cancelled for some unruly behaviour at sea—was the man whom Big Jim always called into council with him, whenever a question arose requiring the strong hand in its settlement.

On the chance of yet being called in also, he stayed working that evening far later than usual, but in vain. No summons came for him, and the two were still closeted together in Big Jim's room when at last he went away. Nor did they leave till long after his departure. Well past midnight flares were burning at the end of one of the landing piers as though men were labouring there, and he guessed who the men were. The first thing that caught his eye on entering the yard next morning was the U.Z.72, tied up at the end of the pier.

"Yes," Big Jim admitted when questioned. "We brought her in last night. She is better out of harm's way. Just write to that friend of ours telling him that his offer is refused. I am going up to town to lay the whole case before my pal, the Home Secretary, so you will

have to deal with him yourself if he comes here again, and it is almost certain that he will. Don't let him know, of course, what we have discovered, but tell him definitely that there is nothing more doing, and that we start breaking her on Friday. His face should be worth seeing when he hears that. Kick him out if he gives any trouble."

"All right," said Davis, as surlily as he dared; he had expected very different measures to be taken against the Don—very different, at any rate, from a mere laying of his case before a Cabinet Minister.

But he wrote the letter, and made it as frigid as he possibly could, and looked forward to the Don's protest visit with some little satisfaction. It was Wednesday. On Thursday morning his visitor awaited him on the office doorstep. There the interview began and ended. The Don opened it with the offer of a bribe. Davis stiffly repeated what Big Jim had said and ordered him out of the yard. Much to his disappointment, he went without causing any trouble, bowing, graceful to the last.

This apparent readiness to accept defeat would certainly have aroused some suspicion in the under-manager's breast during the course of the day, had not another exceedingly heavy rush of business called for all his attention, and not till he left the office and sat in the quiet of his home, did he begin either to remember it, or to invest it with any significance. There came another and still more disquieting memory, however, once the first perturbation had entered his mind. On his way home from the office he had seemed to notice an unusually large number of foreign seamen lounging about, square-headed, evil-looking fellows; sailors, he had thought at the time, from certain German vessels in the neighbouring harbour. But what if they were Guilter's old crew, gathered together, perhaps, for an attempt to steal the submarine?

It was only a vagrant fear at first, but it recurred and recurred, and grew into conviction; not without some further effort would such a man give up so mighty

a prize ! The jewels might be removed, but the submarine remained—the means by which they had been won ; by which more could be won, if the ex-pirates only turned pirates once more. And were they not likely to do so, urged on by disappointment at finding the booty gone !

He telephoned the yard to enquire if all was well. After some delay a night watchman answered and gave the necessary assurance. Still he was not satisfied.

His house stood on the high ground above the offices. He went to a window and looked out. Beneath him the yard lights were burning, and, further away, those of the ships on the mooring station—just the ordinary night spectacle that he had looked down upon many a time. Yet he put on his boots and coat and went out, and the moment he entered the yard gateway he knew that his fears were well grounded ; but too late. A fist smashed out from a shadow by the wall, took him on the ~~point of the chin~~, and stretched him senseless ~~on the~~ ground.

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He awoke to the sound of something unwonted happening at the end of the landing pier. He scrambled to his feet and rushed thither. He was sick and dizzy ; many times he stumbled. And just as he neared the point where the submarine had been moored, he saw her in a moonbeam patch on the still waters, stealing out to sea. The Don was on her conning tower. He heard the buccaneer issuing orders. Then a shadow hid her. A minute later she slid, half submerged, into another splash of moonlight and slipped silently beneath the surface.

There was the sound of a motor launch approaching from the moorings. Idly he waited. He could do nothing. The submarine was gone, and the police—it was a job for Admiralties ! Presently the launch came

into view. He recognised her as one of the yard tenders. Stewart was aboard, with all the night watchmen. *That* was how the submarine had been stolen so easily. He felt too furious to revile them.

The launch glided alongside the jetty and made fast. Catching sight of him on the pierhead, the mate called out a greeting, and scrambled hastily up the steps, shouting out loudly as he came: "That old gun-boat sprang a leak. I had to take off all hands to save her."

"Wheesht!" he added in a warning whisper as he reached the top. "For the love o' God, Davis, say nothing before the men."

He caught Davis by the coat sleeve and drew him away. Davis went with him, hurrying, his heart quickening to the mystery's last phase. Not by accident, then, had the yard been cleared that evening of its watchers! In Stewart's storeroom he learned the reason. One small glow lamp was burning. Stewart, he noticed, avoided radiance, and stood off in the shadow, grim, unforgiving old man.

"MacNeil o' the *Esmeralda* was almost brother to me," he started mumbling. "There was the chief's own brother, and many a poor soul forbye. Out o' the depths; into the depths. Never fear, Davis!" he exclaimed, his voice rising and stern. "She'll no go far. She'll reach the twenty fathom line, mebbe. But she'll stay there."

"What have you done?" Davis asked in a whisper.

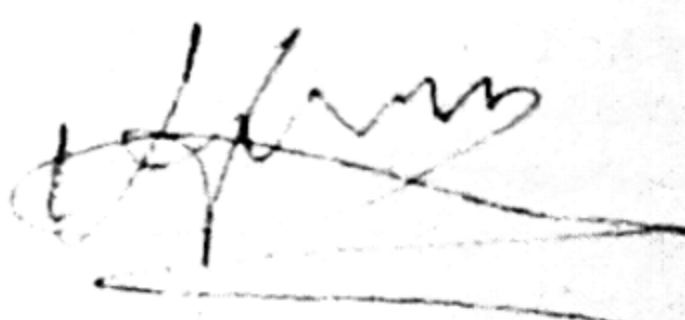
"We cleared some o' her deck plates o' rivets, *him* and me, that night we brought her in"—Stewart's voice had dropped once more; he shuffled further and further into the shadows—"We fixed them thegither again with burnt sugar in the holes, and left her there for him to take if he wanted to. We reckoned he would. Fine strong stuff for rivets, burnt sugar—if only it wouldna melt in water."

His eyes glinted challengingly out of the darkness. Involuntarily Davis averted his gaze. Somewhere beneath the surface of the night-bound sea the black waters

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were rushing in on Otto Guilter and his blood-guilty crew. Out of the depths they had come for their villainies; into the depths they had gone——

When he looked round again, Stewart had stolen away.

If you read this book
Call me in
your memory




CHAPTER IV

THE UNDERMANAGER AT CARN

STEWART kept out of Davis's way for the next two days ; and day after day went by without Big Jim coming near the office or communicating with his undermanager ; and Davis at first was glad that it was so. Well knowing himself to be the nervous, diffident person that he was, he was afraid that, unless time was given him, his self-consciousness might cause a constraint in his manner which Big Jim might regard as disapproval—which impression he was very far from wishing to convey ; quite readily he admitted that Guilter and his crew had only got their deserts. But a new issue arose that altered the situation ; a new worry came to obscure the old. Mrs. Martin began to interfere in his affairs, and as a result he was quickly praying for his chief to return.

She had taken a great liking to him during the matter of Finket ; his behaviour then had shown her how intense was his loyalty to her son, how sterling his worth both as an employee and as a man ; and during her next tri-yearly visit she had mended his clothes as well as Big Jim's and enforced several improvements in his household arrangements ; and he had simply had to do as he was bid.

Even his wrath at his chief's knowing chuckles could not wake spirit enough in him to resist her. Nor had he a stalwart in the shape of a housekeeper to help him defend his home. His sole servant was a man who had sailed with him long as mess-room steward, a mild old fellow, who proved but more helpless than himself against

the attack of the domineering little lady. Now she had determined to go further.

His life was not full enough, she decided; his sole interest seemed to be the firm; he must have another. *That* must be the Home—at least, in the first instance; she had other designs. And no sooner had she decided all this than she began her campaign to enforce her decisions.

Accompanied by a bevy of committee ladies she descended on the office one day and demanded to be shown over the yard. He would have fled had he seen them coming, for he had a horror of meeting strange women. But, cornered in his room, he could not escape her. Confused and annoyed, he led them forth.

They talked of social service, of mission circles, and the duties of citizenship; he did not understand them, and could not add to the conversation. They asked him what he did for his workers. Eagerly he began to describe his precautions for the making of a working-place safe. But they interrupted him. That was only his duty, they said. Did he visit his men in their homes? Did he know their wives and children? He grinned—not from amusement; merely because he was at a loss and thought it polite. The grin, however, suited neither his appearance nor his questioners. He overheard one lady telling another that he looked a bad man. They began to ignore him; at best, to talk at him while talking among themselves. When Steward and MacArthur were caught in a storeroom and introduced, they deserted him in a body, swarmed round the newcomers, and bore them off as guides.

Had this happened at the beginning of their foray, he would have been delighted. Now it only served to make him more angry. The laughter of the circle round MacArthur, the deference of the greater—astonishing fact to him!—circle round Stewart, made him painfully aware of his own failure to entertain them, and filled him with disgruntlement and rage. Had they come

under any other auspices, he would have instantly rid himself of the hurt by ordering the whole crew out of the yard. It looked very much as though Mrs. Martin's campaign for his regeneration had opened on an unfavourable day.

So it certainly would have seemed to the ordinary person. Not so to Mrs. Martin. She was an admirable tactician, and her knowledge of male psychology was subtle. She simply used his discomfiture to strengthen her hold on him. While the others went further and further ahead, she stayed behind and set herself to earn his gratitude by raising his self-esteem; she made him feel that he mattered to her, that she valued his friendship—valued it so highly, that she could talk to him of her family, of her husband, of the early days of her sons, especially of Big Jim.

No topic could have suited Davis better. Big Jim was the third of four sons, she told him; and he felt at once an old friend of the family. He listened to her eagerly, his interest growing; Big Jim's early history had been as stirring as his later. As he heard it his annoyance at the disconcerting crew completely passed away, with it also the last trace of his shock at the Guilter affair. He could only wonder how, out of such a boyhood, his chief had emerged with all the humanity and chivalry that undoubtedly were his.

The father had been a wandering Scot, who, after trying his luck in many countries, had at last settled in Mexico, opened up a mine there, and made it pay. A strong, resolute man, he had needed all his strength and resolution to maintain himself on his property, for the district wherein he had settled was wild, scarcely civilized; he had often to fight and fight hard; at a very early age his sons learned to use both knife and gun. Revolution in the end, however, brought ruin to the family, death to the father and second son. To Big Jim had fallen the hazardous task of extricating his mother and younger brother and conveying them to the coast.

In this he had succeeded, boy though he was, and not yet in his teens. There, the eldest son had joined them: a grown man, he had been engaged in the Australian pearl fishings. To Australia they had gone with him.

But here Davis knew a part of the history was not being told. He filled it in for himself. The name of the township near to which the father had lost his life was familiar to him—not in connection with the assassination—but as the scene of a very terrible Jeddart Justice, conducted by a gang of whites, who had hung as many of the inhabitants as they could capture, and then burned the place to the ground. He guessed the eldest Martin had organised that affair. From what he learned of him, he was the man for such a part. He was his father's son, and he met his father's end. Discoverer of new fishing grounds, he had worked them successfully until a combined onslaught by rival fleets had wiped him out. Then—

“James re-established the business,” said Mrs. Martin simply.

She mentioned Old Stewart as a helper. It but needed the mention of that grim old man's name to enable Davis to guess how the re-establishing had been done.

Later Big Jim had departed on his greater career, and the pearling interests had been left in charge of the youngest son, the man whom Guilter and his crew had held up and murdered on the high seas. Davis wondered what the gallant old lady, talking so placidly to him, yet so proudly, would have said had he told her how Dave Martin's death had been avenged.

He saw that she did not know. There was much else that she did not know also, and he found himself wishing that he had known the other Martins. A rare breed of men they had been. She had been with them in so much, yet they had kept so much from her—the rougher side of their lives, when they had been fighting not only to protect her and each other, but for vengeance, and for their own hand. He felt honoured at being told about

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them. The unfavourable day closed well. When she went away he was more than willing to agree with his chief :—A wonderful little woman Mrs. Martin had been, and was.

She visited him a few days afterwards to reap her harvest, and to begin a very bold move. Wisely, she came alone.

“Just for a chat in passing,” she informed him.

Again he felt honoured. Busy though he was, he listened politely when the chat became a talk about the Home.

This Home of hers, and the work of which it was the centre, was a very wonderful philanthropy. Not only was the wreckage of the street gathered in and salved : efforts were made to deal with the causes. Friendless girls were introduced to friends. Girls in need had only to apply at her offices, or to come under the notice of one of her numerous scouts and helpers, to have their needs supplied. And though imposed upon often, as in such work she was bound to be—“We would rather a million undeserving cases were given assistance,” she said, “than have one deserving young person go under for want of it.”

Davis's interest became very real when she artlessly revealed to him that this policy had been suggested by his chief, who had also provided most of the means.

“Come and see us, Mr. Davis,” she said immediately afterwards. “We are having a little function next week. I know James would be very pleased if he thought you were interested. You will come, won't you?”

Davis promised ; she knew he would, loyalist that he was.

He kept his promise. Much to his disgust, however, she perched him in a prominent place on the platform, the only man on it. Then in horror he discovered, and that only after the chairwoman had called his name, that the *David Davis, Esq.* down on the programme as the principal speaker was no other than himself. Everybody had

started to stare at him. He very nearly ran away. Instead, he got to his feet and delivered an address that made him famous as a public speaker.

He had never made a speech before. Even as he walked to the front of the platform and faced the man or two, and the hundreds of women and girls who were his audience, not the slightest idea had he how to make one. Yet awkward and diffident as he was in the little affairs of life, he always could give of his best when his best was required of him. In a flash he had grasped his theme. He told them of the girls of other lands.

Of the weary drabs of India he told them; of the white-bodiced, comely, contented Cingalee; the gay little coquette of Burmah, her eternal youthfulness, her silks, her huge cigars; the girl of the sampun; the lithe sailor-lass of the junk; of the dainty little lady of Japan—of these and of many more, and he held their attention as no speaker had ever done. He forgot himself entirely. His old life lived for him again, and its glamour passed from his lips in a spell. For over an hour he continued; and he only stopped—brought up sharp by a sense of something wrong—when a chance sideward glance gave him a glimpse of Mrs. Martin, staring at him in admiration and surprise.

“*Mister Davis!* You were simply magnificent,” she exclaimed, bearing down on him enthusiastically at the end of the programme to lead him away for tea.

And so thought every one of the platform ladies. They buzzed around him, singing his praises in that brazen fashion called *gush* in women, and *sycophancy* in mere men; and in their midst he sat, drinking his tea and eating his buttered scone, not yet able to realise that the *David Davis, Esq.* who had made the brilliant speech was plain Davis, the undermanager at Carn; startled as the realisation kept breaking in on him; still outwardly nervous and shrinking; yet secretly delighted with himself and his achievement, and revelling in his new experience as hero of a ladies’ afternoon.

It was the breaking of a chrysalis, the transformation of a lonely, unsocial man into a lion of the drawing-room; the publication of a name that had long lurked behind a variable *nom-de-plume* under widely discussed papers in scientific and technical journals; the beginning of a career of public service that might have made of Davis a chairman of a Pensions Committee, a provost, or even a bailie—the beginning and the end.

"And you have been wounded in the war, I notice, dear Mr. Davis," cooed a young woman who, like many others, had not waited to be introduced to him.

A piece of buttered scone fell from his teeth. He glared at her. The turtling circle around him seemed suddenly hateful.

"Oh no!—Oh no!—Oh no!" he muttered.

A minute later he had broken clear and was speeding for Carn.

Up on the high ground above the yard, he rented a small house—four rooms and two attics, a very modest establishment for one who was a fairly wealthy man and drew a large salary in addition; yet typical of Davis. Typical of him also was the fact that one of the attics was his room.

In it he sought refuge, and for hours he sat writhing in self-mortification. Now and then he got up and walked backwards and forwards, and up and down, in front of the mirror of his wardrobe, the while he twisted his head round into all manner of unnatural and painful positions in the effort to keep in view the image that appeared in the glass. But his posturings brought him no relief. He had been touched in his weakest spot, and the wound was of the soul. In the forgetfulness of that epochal address he had allowed something to be revealed which it was his constant care to keep hidden. He had limped. In the throes of his eloquence his infirmity, the fact of his wooden foot, had been disclosed. And before women! And of all things, that they should ascribe it to the war!

A recrystallised Davis emerged from that travail, a man more intractably unsocial than before. He had leaped ere the trap could close on him. His nature had counter-attacked ere its encircling could be done. He had reverted. Old traits showed their strength. Mrs. Martin's scheme for his social regeneration had definitely failed.

Perhaps she would have become resigned to her failure and left him alone, at least for a time, for she was a wise little woman and had read him shrewdly. But the matter was taken out of her hands. Davis's success had been too real, the impression he had created too great, for him to be allowed to slip away quietly from the consequences. The committee ladies came after him full cry.

They remembered with shame their visit to the ship-breaking yard ; they had wronged him. Then, MacArthur, the handsome and gallant mariner, and the still more attractive old brute Stewart, had absorbed all their attention. Now they realised that the nervous, awkward man who had lung so close to Mrs. Martin's side, and whom they had despised, was even such as they. He too had done things. He too had fought the angry seas. He too was resolute and brave.

And with it all so intensely modest ! So self-effacing ! —the most admirable of qualities to those committee ladies. They pumped Mrs. Martin dry of his history. They bubbled with sympathy. Here was a man who had given a foot in the cause of humanity ! Who had thus incurred the unkindest cut of all—the denial of his right to serve his country in the war. Who therefore could not bear to hear the war spoken of ! A most interesting, a most remarkable, a most desirable man !

In a flood invitations poured in on the undermanager ; strange cars loitered through the streets of Carn ; bolder spirits called at the office. He met every advance courteously, but refused to be drawn from his shell.

Yet he began to grow angry, and, as the hunt continued, more and more angry. Over two hours it took him each day to deal with his new correspondence, for

he dealt with it himself, too bashful to share his replies with a stenographer; and he could ill spare the time. If only they had been men, he often thought—then he could soon have choked them off. But they were women; so courteous he remained.

A little rudeness would have paid him better. His courtesy was misconstrued. He was but a very shy man, thought the ladies, and only needed more coaxing. Therefore the invitations were doubled and trebled; the bolder spirits waxed bolder and increased. Even Mrs. Martin was misled by his behaviour. In addition, however, all the misconstruings were poured into her ears. She determined on a resumption of the campaign. Once again she appeared at Carn with a bevy of helpers. Not so many as on the former visit: only four, the fairest and most amiable. As MacArthur and Stewart were afloat, guide Davis perforce had to be.

Yet he acted unwillingly, and she saw his unwillingness, and deduced from it the error into which she had strayed. Nevertheless retreat was not for her. Having resumed the war, she waged it with vigour, and very soon had forfeited nearly all his regard.

In horror and fury he awoke to her real objective. In the night the knowledge came, as he lay half asleep, his busy brain still pondering. At first he thought it the nightmare. Thenceforth he ceased to answer the letters. To the callers he was always away. When Mrs. Martin swooped down again with the usual bevy, a scout gave him warning; he took ship aboard the launch and fled to the roadstead, and there remained in shelter of the derelicts until she had gone away. Old Stewart happened to be ashore that day; and the old fellow, who liked Davis—though his liking was not very obvious—sent off the summoning boat with orders not to summon. Had Big Jim delayed his journey much longer, Carn would have lost its undermanager.

He returned in time. Davis, out in the yard when the news was brought to him, rushed back to the offices,

snatched up a handful of the unopened, tinted and scented envelopes, and burst into his room.

"Hulloa, Davis! How goes it?" was Big Jim's greeting.

Davis spoke no greeting in reply.

"Read some of those, sir," he said sourly, slithering the letters on to the desk in front of him.

Big Jim opened one of them, sniffed it, read it, read one or two of the others, and chuckled.

"I would never have believed it of you, Davis," he said, his tone solemn, his eyes twinkling.

"What do you mean, sir?" Davis growled.

"Well,—been going the pace a bit, haven't you, while I've been away?"

"*Me!* God!—it's your mother. She's landed——"

"Here, Davis," interrupted Big Jim in sudden surprise. "I noticed a whole lot in the papers a little while ago about a Mr. David Davis giving a speech at her Home. That was never *you*?"

"It was."

"Gad!"

Big Jim glanced admiringly at his undermanager.

"Gad!" he said again. Then: "I never thought it in you."

"Oh, it's in me all right," said Davis sarcastically. "And three days from now I'm booked to do the same again."

"No! I'll come to hear you," exclaimed Big Jim enthusiastically.

"Will you?—Oh no, you won't, sir. I'm not going."

"But I thought you said——?"

"I'm not going."

"Why?"

Davis gave him some account of what had been happening.

"Oh hell, sir," he burst out in exasperation as Big Jim began to grin. "Don't *you* start guying me, for heavens' sake. This is a serious matter."

"Damn serious," remarked Big Jim. "If you don't keep your date I'm afraid she'll come and fetch you."

"She won't," said Davis grimly, keeping his temper with difficulty

"I've been waiting for you to come back, sir," he continued, "in the hope that you would do something to stop the business. Since apparently you won't, or can't, you can take my job back this very minute. I'm clearing out to-night, and I'll chance you bringing an action against me for breach of agreement."

"What's that, Davis?" Big Jim asked incredulously

"Just what I'm saying, sir—I'm clearing out to-night. I don't mind doing ten hours a day for you here—or twenty-four hours for that matter, sir—on legitimate company work. But I didn't tie myself to your mother's apron strings as well, and I'm through with it."

Big Jim stared in surprise.

"Surely you are taking too serious a view of a little bit of social service, Davis," he said gravely. "It may be annoying to you, of course——"

"Social service be hanged, sir," snapped Davis. "It's a darned sight more serious than that. She's trying to provide me with a *wife*!"

"No!"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"It's obvious. She's as good as told me.—Said I needed someone to look after me—to take a greater personal interest in me. And I don't!"

"Don't you?" said Big Jim, some malign imp still making his eyes twinkle.

Davis did not reply. Big Jim glanced at him curiously. And some subtle shade in his undermanger's expression seemed to be detected and understood by him, for instantly his manner changed.

"It's really too bad of her," he said sympathetically. "Really too bad. I must talk to her. I am certainly not going to lose you as undermanager here. You just

keep your date, Davis, and I'll see that you are not troubled further."

"I won't," said Davis dourly.

"But you must."

"No fear," said Davis. "Besides, I'd have to explain to all that gang why I haven't answered their letters lately, and that would give them a tighter grip on me than ever. I'm not going, sir."

"But don't you see," said Big Jim in alarm, "that if you don't go, she'll nobble me? And I simply can't stand that poultry farm she's laid in around her."

"Can't you stop her then, sir?" enquired Davis. "Can't you control her? It's simply terrible that a little woman like her should have such a pull."

Big Jim shook his head.

"You promised, you know," he muttered.

"*Promised!*—Jove! You know your mother better than I do," said Davis scornfully. "She might just as well have bound and gagged me before booking me for that date."

"I know," muttered Big Jim. "But——"

He did not finish his sentence. Davis waited.

"Well now you know the position, sir," he said at length, seeing no hope of his chief intervening. "It's not the devil of a life I've had this past month or so that matters. It's the hell of a life I see in front. To-night I'm going to disappear."

He went back to his room and sat down at his desk, too thoroughly roused to go out yet awhile to his job of work in the yard, or even to think, for that matter, of the great upset in his life that he had just decreed. Not yet was the clangour sounding as a requiem. The familiar objects around him were but as he was wont to see them from day to day. All he felt, all he apprehended, was the need for flight beyond Mrs. Martin's sphere.

He heard his chief come into the room but did not look at him. For some time Big Jim stood without speaking. Then he said:

"There is only one thing for it, Davis. You and I have both got to disappear."

Davis burst out laughing; he could not restrain himself. Serious though he felt the situation to be, it seemed utterly ludicrous that two grown men, especially such a tremendous fellow as Big Jim, should feel constrained to take flight before a little old woman like Mrs. Martin.

"It is not quite so bad as that," said Big Jim dryly. "Don't you forget either that my mother has always pretty good grounds for her interferences. She has a head on her, and it's a dashed sight better in most respects than either yours or mine. But that aside! Even if she had not, I would still let her do pretty much as she wanted. She had to start in to manage the family affairs when I was very young, and when there was no one else to do it, and she managed them as no one else could have done it. But she has been a manager ever since. She still thinks of me as so high, as what I was when she made me fetch and carry for her, and run her errands—ay! and run them like hell; and she has had the idea too long for me to think of cutting loose now. It would break the old lady up. However, she has simply got to be stopped mixing her Home up with Carn. The gang she has got round her are simply the limit. I know them, and I don't blame you for kicking. I am going to stop her, and them, for good and all, but in my own way. We'll turn Old Stewart loose on them. I've thought of doing so for some time. You and I will be called away at the last moment, and Stewart will go to their meeting and deliver the address."

"Stewart!" exclaimed Davis in astonishment. To him Stewart was the last man of all to send as a speaker to Mrs. Martin's Home. "You can't send him, sir. Send MacArthur rather."

"No," said Big Jim. "MacArthur is a darned good seaman and a darned good chap, but he ends there. It is more difficult to find where Stewart begins."

"But can he speak?"

"He has harangued a mob into revolution before now. — Besides, he is the one man my mother has never been able to do anything with," Big Jim continued confidently. "And she knows it. I have seen her talk her head off at him, and the old oyster has just stood still and said nothing,—and done nothing. Don't you worry. He will give that darned hen-run my mother keeps something to scratch over, and be glad of the opportunity. Thinks them forward. He is a Scot of Scots, and though you would not think so, Presbyterianism is in his bones."

And the mate readily agreed to go.

"Yes, I'll give the lassies a bit talk," he said, when summoned and told what was wanted of him.

"And that's that matter settled," said Big Jim firmly when he had gone.

So on the day fixed for his second address at the Home, Davis found himself travelling south with his chief, glad now that the break with the firm had at least been delayed, for in the two days intervening he had more and more realised how tremendous would be any such parting; yet feeling very uncomfortable as he thought of the possible consequences, and already beginning to dread the return.

But Stewart played his part well.

Despite his fears, Davis could not but laugh as heartily as his chief when the latter brought the story of what the mate had done. The terrible old man had as good as held up the committee ladies as examples to the assembled girls of all that modest young women should avoid.

"There has been such a cackling and crowing among them," Big Jim chuckled. "Several have resigned. Your troubles are ended, my man. A speaker will never be asked for again from Carn."

"But what is your mother saying to it?" Davis enquired, his amusement becoming intermingled with alarm.

"My mother has a sense of humour, fortunately," replied Big Jim. "And she is just as old-fashioned as

Stewart. And then it was Stewart. And Gad!——”

He burst out laughing.

“Gad, Davis,” he continued. “It just comes to this—you can never take women at their face value, and a woman’s committee is just the queerest thing that ever was. You would have thought by the way my mother always treated two or three of the resignées that they were her most valued assistants. I’ve seen her simply purring round them, stroking them down like anything. And now!—If the old lady isn’t simply bubbling over with glee at them hooking it, may I be hanged.”

“But what is she saying about me, sir?”

“You?”

Davis bridled at the tone.

“I’m afraid she is not so interested in your welfare as she used to be,” said Big Jim.

“Oh, isn’t she!” Davis muttered involuntarily.

“Well, I’m hanged!” exclaimed Big Jim, staring at him. “You’re a queer devil. Isn’t that what you wanted?”

“I never wanted her to begin being interested,” growled the undermanager and bent immediately over his work.

*not a good
book*

CHAPTER V

THE GRAVEN GUINEA

BIG JIM did not err when he told his undermanager that no trouble and no further interference with his affairs were to be apprehended from Mrs. Martin and the lady helpers of her Home. Many weeks went by before Davis came in contact with the managing little woman again, and the effusive missives, which had continued to come to him to the very day of Stewart's oration ceased thereafter. One other letter he did receive, however, and that from the most eager of his tormentors. Its tone was reassuring: "I do not suppose," this quondam admirer wrote, "that to such a creature as you have shown yourself to be, my opinion will matter. . . ." Nevertheless she stated her opinion of his conduct and he grinned as he read it.

"If that is a safe line to what the rest are thinking," he murmured, "then I ought to be pretty safe, too. Jove, you've only got to disappoint some women and the cats of Sodom and Gomorrah are simply not in it with them. She ain't no lady, anyway."

So he tore the letter into small pieces and made a bonfire of them in his ash-tray, and resumed his labours well content. An abusive letter, even though written by a woman, was but a small ill to bear in return for his immunity from her other attentions and those of her like; and though Mrs. Martin was evidently offended with him, what did that matter, after all, as long as she kept her offence at a distance! He had been afraid that she

would bring it to the landing stage to greet his and Big Jim's return; he had dreaded the crow-plucking—inevitable, he had thought it. Matters had shaped themselves very nicely on the whole.

But it was not in the nature of things that so audacious a baulking of a woman like Mrs. Martin could be done with impunity, and this the undermanager gloomily admitted to himself, not a great many weeks after his congratulatory bonfire in the ash-tray; and though to the ordinary observer Mrs. Martin's connection with the troublous happenings which forced him to the admission could scarcely have been very plain, to him it was manifest. For her interference it was that drove him to the trip aboard the gunboat *Nidar*, the vessel which he and his chief had brought to Carn together; and if he had not taken that voyage, he would never have noticed certain bags in one of her storerooms, nor become curious about their contents. Curious he did become, and as soon after his return as he found time to do so, he sought to satisfy his curiosity. Not more than an hour later, he came hurrying back from the roadstead and stalked into his chief's room.

"There's a funny thing to find aboard a German gunboat, sir!" he exclaimed, and tossed a small object on to the desk in front of Big Jim.

Big Jim, busy writing, glanced casually at the object and continued to write.

"It all depends what it is and where you found it, Davis," he answered irritably.

"I found it aboard the *Nidar*, sir, and I think it is some kind of a quid. There's a whole heap queer about it. But if you don't want to be worried . . . ?"

Pen still between his fingers, Big Jim reached out for the find—a small disc of gold, the metal almost hidden under an incrustation of paint and white lead.

"It looks like a guinea," he said, and he laid down the pen and began to scrape at the incrustation with his

thumb nail. "Yes, it is," he added. "A mint specimen, too. How did it collect all this muck?"

"That's the funny thing, sir. It was hidden in it—stuck against a base-plate in No. 1 Engine-room Stores, and made up with the white lead and painted over to look like a bolt-head or a biggish blister. I was hauling out some stores to see what they were, when I overbalanced and grazed the plate with my boot—knocked a bit of the lead off, and the gold glinted in my light. Somebody must have wanted to hide the thing pretty badly to go and think of a cute dodge like that?"

"Ay, it's a bit queer, Davis. Get some turpentine and we'll clean the thing."

Davis made haste to obey. Into the tin of solvent that he brought, Big Jim placed the guinea. Under the rub of his strong fingers the incrustation soon commenced to crumble, and presently most of it was gone. He took the coin out and laid it on the blotter, reverse uppermost. It was a mint specimen, as he had said. Though traces of impurity still clung to the bezels of the numerals, the date stood out boldly on either side the topmost crown.

"Sixteen seventy," read Davis.

"The year before Morgan took Panama," murmured Big Jim.

"And two hundred and twenty-two before my Aunt Elizabeth died," murmured Davis ironically, his interest making him gird at the irrelevance of the remark.

"Quite so," said Big Jim. "Shows how our thoughts run—yours for great aunts, mine for great seamen. Sixteen seventy-one is one of the red-letter dates in my mind, Davis. There was never a greater sailor than Morgan, and never a greater deed done by sailors than the taking of Panama. And of all things he was a Welshman. Gad, some things take a deal of explaining."

He turned the guinea over.

"Carolus the Second," he said, beginning to read the inscription. "By the grace of—— Gad! This is very, very strange."

Quickly he dipped the coin back into the turpentine and rubbed it vigorously where a streak of pigment still marred its surface. He brought it out clean. The streak had covered a marking. Davis leaned forward.

"By the grace of God," Big Jim repeated. "And to show what he thought of that, somebody has gone and stuck two arrows through King Charles' head."

"What a remarkable thing!" Davis exclaimed, and he snatched the guinea up and examined it closely.

Plainly and deeply across its face the arrows were engraved. One transfixed the head, entering about the medulla and coming out at the bridge of the nose, and with butt and barb both impinging on the circumference, formed as true a diameter as he himself, skilled draughtsman though he was, could have drawn. Of the second arrow, only the barb and a small portion of the shaft was visible. It too impinged on the circumference. Across the rim from each point of impact was cut a fine hair line.

"Well?" demanded Big Jim.

Davis put the guinea down, and stared at his chief, unable to understand the challenge in his tone.

"D'ye see anything about your Aunt Elizabeth on it?"

"What in all the world do you mean, sir?"

"That guinea was with Morgan at Panama."

"No?"

"It was."

"By Jove," muttered Davis. "I can't quite take all this in," he added, and gaped.

"It seemed funny enough to find the thing in the way I did," he continued, "without anything else cropping up. Do you mean to say you know this guinea, sir? It's almost incredible."

"Every beachcomber in the Pacific knows of it, I'm sorry to say," replied Big Jim slowly.

He had grown very grave.

"Knows what, sir?" Davis prompted.

"I'll tell you presently. Just pass the word for Stewart. I want him to see this first."

Davis went himself to summon the mate: he was so excited by the extraordinary development of his discovery, and so eager to hear what his chief had to tell, that he wanted Stewart brought on the scene in the shortest possible time. The mate's chief duty when ashore was the sorting and pricing of entire ship's stores and equipment, stripped from the derelicts. In the storeshed allotted to such things, the undermanager found him, and hurried him back to his chief's room.

"Do you see this?" said Big Jim, pushing the guinea more into view as they entered. "Tell your yarn, Davis."

Davis repeated the tale of his discovery. Stewart's expression gave no hint of what his thoughts were as he listened, nor had he shown any initial surprise; yet the undermanager was not misled by his indifference. He felt sure that the mate knew the guinea also.

"Nasty, isn't it?" said Big Jim when the tale had been told.

"Very," grunted the old man. "I doubt something has happened to Billy Mataala."

"Who's he?" interjected Davis, stirred to questioning by the oddity of the name.

"An old kanaka chief—a king," Big Jim explained to him. "King of Maca, one of the Polynesian Group. He owned this guinea once. . . . Have you heard anything of Billy recently?" he asked of Stewart.

"Not these seven years. But I'm thinking it would be worth enquiring."

"Ay."

Big Jim looked gravely at the mate for a little while.

"I don't like the look of this, Stewart," he said. "You haven't heard anything?—nothing at all?"

The mate shook his head.

"The *Nidar* is wood-sheathed and coppered, sir," Davis ventured. "Was she on their Pacific Station?"

Big Jim nodded.

"Then obviously the guinea has been stolen by somebody aboard?"

"It has been stolen all right," said Big Jim. "There's no question about that; and the natural inference is that somebody aboard the *Nidar* stole it. But what Stewart and I would like to know is what has happened to Billy Mataala. He was a friend of ours. We had a good deal to do with him once; and I can tell you, we're just as much surprised at seeing that guinea out of his possession as you would be if a burglar got off with the Crown Jewels, or stole the Bank of England. He didn't exactly keep it in his waistcoat pocket, you know, or lying about his hut. Seeing it made all the difference between his being king and a kind of fourth-rate chief, he looked after it some, and I don't suppose more than four men saw it while he owned it. However, I'll be telling you about Billy. . . . Right, Stewart."

2

The mate at once took the hint and withdrew, impassive as when he was summoned. His abrupt departure was a surprise to the undermanager, who had expected much more from a summoning of the grim old man. He suspected more had passed than he had been aware of, interested and attentive though he had been. Often this suspicion came to him when he was talking with the pair. The understanding between them was so deep and old that words, even looks, were unnecessary for the conveying of their thoughts, as he very well knew. But the eagerness was still on him. The tale of the guinea he was burning to hear. And once Big Jim began, the wandering thought was lost to him. When it returned, it came one among many, and in sinister days.

"You will never make a queerer find than that guinea," said Big Jim. "It has had a bigger history

than any other coin. There's a lot to tell, and you will need to let me do the telling in my own way. I told you it had been with Morgan at Panama. It went there in the pocket of a young fellow called Adrian Angell, a volunteer who had come straight from England to join the Buccaneers.

"He arrived after all the fighting was done, however, so there was no dividend for him from the spoil—which did not suit him at all. He took a caravel lying in Panama harbour, and went buccaneering on his own account; and he did so well that in five years' time round the Horn he came, with enough below his hatches to let him play country squire to the end of his days, and far more left behind."

"And that guinea is the clue to where he buried his treasure?" exclaimed Davis excitedly.

"Something like that."

"By Jove," murmured Davis, and he took up the coin, fingered and examined it, his eyes shining: the only books he ever read, apart from textbooks, were stories of adventure, especially treasure-hunting tales.

Big Jim made no effort to cut short his examination; it seemed almost as though he were glad of the chance to waste time.

"Didn't Angell bring this with him?" Davis had to say before he resumed. "How did your Billy Mataala get it?"

"Angell brought it home, but it travelled West again," replied Big Jim; "and it figured next in a regular *Marie Celeste* yarn. Ever hear of the schooner *Merrymac*?"

"I think I have," Davis answered after a little hesitation. "I think an old skipper I sailed with in my first year or two afloat once mentioned the name during a talk of mysteries of the sea."

"You've got it. The *Merrymac* was a schooner found adrift in the Pacific with every one of her crew gone except the skipper, who was dead in his cabin."

"And his name was Angell! I remember now," Davis exclaimed. "Was he one of the same family out trying to lift his ancestor's treasure?"

"He was—and the last of them, too. He fitted out the *Merrymac*. And he took a stroke at sea and died. That was all there was to it, though to most folks the affair is a mystery to this day."

"But what happened to the crew?"

"They cleared out as soon as they found him dead. It was an awkward position for them. Suspicion gathers quickly when anything goes wrong in treasure-hunting—and it was known well enough what Angell was after. Can you keep anything like that quiet in the South Seas! They were all Kanaka, moreover. He would not trust a white with him. They simply panicked, ran the schooner close inshore and swam for it, and she was blown out to sea."

"Billy Mataala was Angell's boy——"

"And he took the guinea," interjected Davis drily.

"Yes. But you needn't think anything else," said Big Jim sharply.

"Sorry, sir," murmured Davis—Big Jim had waited for his apology.

"Unfortunately for that crew," said Big Jim crossly, resuming the tale, "they had struck an island inhabited by an unfriendly tribe. And some were drowned through trying to swim back to the schooner, and some were eaten by sharks, and some were eaten ashore. Billy was the sole survivor. He made himself useful to his captors in a scrap, and they adopted him. A great warrior was Billy Mataala, before he grew fat and old. He made himself king of Maca when he escaped. That guinea was one of his trump cards. . . . Interesting, that coin?"

"By Jove yes, sir."

"So was Billy. Gad, you must have heard of him, Davis!" Big Jim exclaimed, warming up to his tale, as though under the influence of an old enthusiasm that the touch of memory had revived. "—No? That's the

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worst of you big-ship men. You're all much of a much with Cook's tourists, only paid.

"When Billy started in, Maca was just a big lump of an island, no use to any white at all except for blackbirding and the dumping of an occasional cargo of gin. The villages were nothing; the folks wore grass and coco-fibre. And Billy was about the furthest down of a whole swarm of chiefs—owned a four-house town and about fifty copra palms, no more. But in ten years time he had turned his four houses into a real town, with streets, and stores, and consulates. His rise is one of the romances of the Islands and the Seas. He put the tale about that he had the way to Adrian Angell's treasure cache, and the whites came flocking in. They brought the trade. They built his town.—That was a Kanaka for you, Davis! That kingdom came to him like age. . . . And now that comes here."

Big Jim stopped, and stared sombrely at the coin.

"He may have parted with it," Davis suggested after a while.

"It is obvious that he has."

"I meant he might have parted with it in quite an ordinary way, sir. Sold it, or something," Davis explained.

"It's more than likely. With the other chiefs as jealous of him as they could be—with the common folks mainly supporting him because of their fancy for a king who could lift more dollars whenever he liked than the great D.H. & P.G.—it's just the sort of thing he would do. Gad!" growled Big Jim irritably. "Try something else."

But Davis was not greatly concerned about what had happened to the Kanaka king, friend of his chief though he had been. A much more potent interest was at work in his mind. He took up the guinea, and kept silent; his imagination had been tremendously excited by its discovery and its tale.

A bit of a dreamer for all his efficiency as a man of business and soundness as an engineer, as he had sat

listening, visions had been rising before his eyes—visions of great buccaneerings of the long ago : of golden galleons laid athwart ; of treasure cities spoiled ; of the fierce, picturesque men who fought and revelled together in their holds in the isles of the Caribbean, and went down in the tall ships of Tortuga to dare the Spaniard in the Spanish Main. It had been his fate to be a big-ship man all his days at sea ; and all his days he had envied the little-ship men. He, too, would have liked to go searching with the winds among the enchanted isles, learning their tales and their secrets—perhaps digging out their buried gold ! Now, after many years, romance had entered his life at last, for the first time, and with this graven coin.

“ What do the arrows mean, sir ? ” he enquired. “ Do you know ? ”

“ They’re a compass bearing,” Big Jim replied.

“ Is that all ? . . . That’s not much of a clue, sir ? ”

“ Isn’t it ? ” The telephone bell rang. Big Jim took the message. “ No, it isn’t,” he said, as he pushed the instrument aside. “ All other details are engraved on other guineas.”

“ There are more ! ”

Davis jumped excitedly to his feet.

“ Why the deuce didn’t you tell me so before, sir ? ” he exclaimed.

“ Why should I ? What’s all your fuss about ? ”

“ Why ? Because the others might be hidden aboard the *Nidar* as well, and here we’ve been—— Good lord ! ” Davis took a pace or two towards the door.

He turned to find Big Jim eyeing him with great disapproval ; but he was too excited to comprehend the reason for it. Adrian Angell’s treasure seemed within his grasp.

“ Aren’t you coming to look for them, sir ? ” he asked, pausing for a moment, astonished at what he thought was his chief’s luke-warmness.

“ You’re going to look for them, aren’t you ? ” said Big Jim stiffly.

"Rather! They're the clues, maybe, to a million pounds?"

"All right. Get on with it," said Big Jim. "But I think I'll do some work."

3

Davis went straight aboard the *Nidar* and began his search; and he searched for a fortnight without finding a trace of what he sought. She was not a large vessel. In a week he had examined her very thoroughly. Yet he gave the other week to examining her more thoroughly still, so unwilling was he to relinquish his dreams—he had been planning a treasure voyage. And all the while Big Jim never once asked him how his search was faring.

Big Jim was very grim these days. Of far more concern to him, Davis saw, was the fate of his quondam associate, the Kanaka king. And that the concern had been more than passive the undermanager was to discover. Entering his chief's room one day, bent on getting a decision on a matter of policy which he could not settle for himself, he found Big Jim and Stewart seated there together, the sheets of a long cipher cablegram scattered around them, the paper containing the decoded message between them on the desk—both grim, looking across at each other, men under the first shock of very bad news.

"Is Billy Mataala dead, sir?" he asked impulsively.

Neither replied for a little while. Then Big Jim said very quietly:

"He was murdered the day before the outbreak of war, Davis. We got that by cable some time ago"

"Then what's the trouble now, sir?"

Old Stewart it was who told him—he spoke even more quietly. Davis sat down, appalled. Billy Mataala had met a long drawn out, terrible end, and with him had died his adopted son; but what awed the undermanager as much was the quietness of these two, his friends. Through

the devious associative processes of his mind, came the notion to him of the softness of a padded foot beneath the claw.

"It's simply ferocious, sir," he said, his awe giving way to wrath. "It's difficult to believe that such things could be done at the present day."

"There's many a ferocious thing done still, Davis," Big Jim replied slowly. "I aye feared something like this would happen to Billy in his old age."

"Ay, many," Stewart intervened suddenly, all his wonted impassivity gone, the same fervour in his voice as when he told of Otto Guilter's end. "Many, many. In the far and distant lands, the little isles. In the Islands o' the Seas."

He drew the cablegram towards him, and bent his fierce old face close to it, while he re-read and studied its contents. No satisfaction, if such he sought, came to him from the re-reading. Shaking his head, he rose.

"I'll away," he said; and he went away.

"We owed Billy a good deal," said Big Jim when the door had closed. "The whole of us did. When my brother was wiped out with his gang, it was Billy who sheltered my mother and Dave, and helped Stewart and me to put things right—at a time when he had his hands pretty full with his own affairs. He thought a lot of my brother. And of Stewart."

"No wonder you weren't very interested in hunting up his treasure," said Davis apologetically.

But the apology escaped Big Jim's notice.

"It's very strange that guinea turning up here, Davis," he said soberly, pursuing his own train of thought. "I had not seen Billy for nearly twenty years, and word comes of him this way—packed away in a ship that I bought by chance. It's both a reminder and a reproach. . . . It's a remarkable thing! Billy might almost have done it himself as a hint to us to get busy. Though how we are going to square his accounts——!"

Big Jim shrugged his shoulders, drew the letter near

him and re-read and studied its contents, just as Stewart had done.

"But surely it is known who did it, sir?" Davis ventured.

"It's not."

"Do you mean to say no one is even suspected?—a crime like that!"

"I have a list of names here, sent me by a pretty sound man on the spot," said Big Jim, pointing to the letter. "Every one is the name of a man who might have had a hand in the business. And there's nearly a hundred of them. . . . I don't know half of them. There's more than Germans on that list, too," he added significantly. "A hanged sight more."

"But one of them must have been a German, sir?"

"It looks like it, but it doesn't follow."

"How's that?"

"The guinea might have been stolen twice."

"So it might," Davis admitted. "But it must have been a German who brought it aboard, and he must have known who the murderers were?"

"Ay. The suspicion is on the *Nidar* right enough. . . . And she has been an empty ship for years."

"You could limit the possibles a bit by getting a list of her crew and comparing it with the list you have there?" Davis suggested.

"Ay. But do you happen to know anyone at the German Admiralty?"

"No, sir," Davis replied quite seriously.

And if it were irony Big Jim had intended, he did not emphasise it.

"Neither do I," he said quite seriously also. "Besides, even if we could get it, the official list would not have all the names of those who served aboard her during the war. She had any amount of deserters; and any amount of volunteers, picked up here and there all through the islands as she went along—refugees, many of them. They have tramped out the trail, I doubt, Davis."

"Still, murder should out, sir. And I should have thought something more definite would have been known by this time, spite of the crush."

"Ordinarily it would," Big Jim admitted. "The Islands would have got to know in time. Someone would have been pointed at, and every saloon would have whispered his name soon as he entered, soon as a pal of his entered. That was aye the way in my day. That would be the way now, only the war has altered things, interrupted the old talk-lines, separated or killed out men who used to drink together at certain times every year, or heave to and give each other taffrail news—ay! and doubtless sent many a knowing lad out of the islands, who will maybe think it wise to stay away. . . . But I wish I knew! Gad, I wish I knew!"

He folded up the letter, put it away in his desk, and nodded Davis his dismissal.

"Just one thing more, sir," Davis ventured. "Do you think they got the treasure?"

Big Jim looked up at him sharply, in his glance suspicion, which quickly died.

"I'm certain they didn't," he replied. "That guinea would not have been hidden away so carefully if they had. Someone was preserving it for future use—someone who meant to come back for it, or to find it there again," he added.

"I'm glad of that," said Davis; and he withdrew to his own room, inwardly a very abashed man, for him the glamour of buried treasure dissipated for all time to come.

He could scarcely realise now how he had shown such avidity in the pursuit of the missing guineas—cupidity, his chief might well have thought it; or how he had been so tactless, so lacking in sensibility. Far more likely to be the outcome of his discovery was an expedition to trace the murderers and to avenge. Eager to help to that end, and to make amends, he took up the problem of finding out who they could be, and studied it hard. But the

attempt was more hopeless for him than the search for the guineas ; it was scarcely even a problem. He had nothing to work upon, nothing but his fancy to employ. And Stewart had tacitly confessed himself beaten. Big Jim had seemed as wholly at a loss what to do. His interest in the matter could not but begin to wane in the end. Nothing happened to keep it alive.

There were no more cablegrams, no more ominous conferences between Big Jim and Stewart ; nothing more was ever said about the guineas ; if anything was being done, he saw no sign.

On the other hand, his duties as undermanager were making great demands on his attention ; he became busy, enormously busy. The placing of certain Government contracts had brought a huge rush of orders and enquiries for scrap steel, and as trade had been bad for a long time, the company breaking ships without selling much of the breakage, he felt constrained to reap as big a harvest as possible, especially as all his business instincts warned him that it was only a transitory boom.

He cleared his store bings in a week, huge though they were, and accepted further orders with the steel that was to supply them still on the hulks, still to be stripped and graded. He committed himself and the firm to almost impossible contracts, then perforce nearly killed himself in the triumphant endeavour to achieve the almost impossible. What with the work and the worry, and the resulting exhaustion of body and mind, he had completely forgotten that ever a guinea had come to Carn at all, when three men came out of Big Jim's past, seeking Big Jim.

4

Big Jim was away on one of his mystery trips when the three men arrived at Carn. It was nightfall when they came to the offices. The yards were empty. The

clerks had gone home. Davis sat alone in the building, working overtime.

He liked the quiet of the night for his hardest labours ; his busy brain worked more busily then. The sound of the evening hooter, a call to home and leisure to all the other employees, was ever a call and a stimulus to him. Now, however, his work was done. He sat, leaning backwards, letting the dregs of it drain from his brain ere he would go home. Pleasingly through the stillness was coming to his ears the murmur of the full sea, the sprightly rustle now and then of a wave between two stranded derelicts, and the song of the derelicts themselves, the low hum of their loosened plates and frames, vibrating in the gentle night breeze. Suddenly from the outer office sounded discreet footsteps.

"Who's that?" he called, thinking the interrupter some forgetful clerk come to repair an omission of the day, and wishing to know who the delinquent was.

Someone knocked at his door.

"Come in," he shouted.

The door opened and the three men came in.

A thrill of cold ran down the undermanager's spine : they came so quietly : one of them closed the door so quietly. Evil had come into the room ; he felt it instinctively. In a row, backs to the further wall and motionless, they stood regarding him, an odd trio ; one tall and thin ; one fat and short—very fat, sweaty ; and one thin and short, but all dangerous and wary : whatever country had mothered them, they were of the world's bad men, toughs, cosmopolitan, and of the sea. He was reminded of Otto Guilter. Here were three others such as the buccaneer ; and he thought of the revolver in the topmost drawer of his desk, and wished the drawer were open. Yet he showed neither surprise nor alarm.

"Well?" he enquired, coolly surveying them.

The fat man answered—evidently their leader, for it was at a nudge from him that the door had been closed ;

and if he were a foreigner, his accent did not betray him. Either he was English, or he had lived long with Englishmen.

"Are you Davis?" he enquired.

"Yes. That's my name," replied the undermanager, speaking civilly enough, though his eyes had narrowed for an instant at the omission of the "Mr."

"Then we are Jim's friends," said the fat man, coming nearer. "Can we see him? Is he here?"

Wary he still was, but eager now as well; and the snaky eyes of his two companions seemed to grow more snaky as they waited for the reply. Davis laid his hand on the handle of the revolver drawer.

"What do you want?" he asked. "And who are you?"

"I'm Papa," answered the fat man. "He's Long Joe, and he's Holy Gee."

Davis was hard put to it to conceal his bewilderment at the reply. In addition, though neither priggish nor particularly religious, he was both angered and shocked by the last nickname. It showed him what manner of men they were. He drew open the drawer, clasped the revolver with one hand, and, as cover for the action, drew out a piece of stationery with the other:

"Do you mind writing it all down?" he said.

To his greater bewilderment the fat man readily agreed.

"You're no green hand, Davis," he said as he wrote. "Come on, you two," he called to his companions. "Davis here knows what he is about. . . . There you are," he continued, pushing the paper from him when they had finished. "Jim will know our marks. I don't suppose you can pass it to him now?"

"No," said Davis.

"Very good. He was always a sly fellow was Jim. We are putting up at the Roxburgh. Will you send us word? Or will we come back here, say the same time to-morrow night?"

"I'll send you word," said Davis.

"When?"

"Soon as I know."

And with that the strange visit was over. As quietly as they had come, the sinister trio withdrew. Davis sat rigid in his chair, listening to the retreating footfalls, and he still sat rigid for some time after the stealthy feet had ceased to sound. It was far and away the most astonishing interview that he had ever granted. He could scarcely believe that it had taken place.

He stirred at last, and his first action was to take the revolver out of the drawer and place it in his breast pocket. Without another instant's delay he left the office in search of Old Stewart.

Old Stewart, on his daughter's marriage, had given up his house to her and her husband, and retired to lodgings. In the same house lived MacArthur. The two were kin—if Stewart could be said to be kin to any man. They were joint owners of a small sailing yacht, and of all the yachting trophies of the estuary. Davis found the mate seated crosslegged on the floor of his sitting-room, engaged in putting cringles in a new main-sail. MacArthur was at sea, and the old man was alone, except for a large, untethered macaw, which immediately began repeating at an exceedingly rapid rate the hundred and nineteenth psalm.

"You've started him," was the old man's greeting, "and now he is started he will just need to finish. If I check him, he'll wait till we're a' asleep, and then break out again."

In the midst of the horrid din, Davis was obliged to tell his tale; and it proved from the beginning a most disappointing visit. For the bird shouted him down. It seemed to regard him as a rival orator. Raise his voice as he might, it screamed the louder. The tale could not but suffer. Stewart seemed wholly unimpressed. Still seated crosslegged, the leach of the sail across his knees, his head bent over it, he continued his work throughout;

nor did he make any remark at the conclusion, nor any reply when Davis sought his opinion of the affair.

"Do you know any of them?" the undermanager at last demanded, flicking the nickname paper within a foot of the mate's busy fingers.

Stewart fiddled out a newly-finished cringle, forced the thimble into place, and reached for his canvas knife before replying.

"Ay," he said; and that was all.

"Then who are they?"

"Three swipes."

"But what do you think they want?"

"How should I know?" replied the mate, busy the while measuring and cutting off the required length of rope for another cringle.

"But they want something, man!" exclaimed the undermanager heatedly. "They came expecting to get something, and I've to send them word. What do you think we should do?"

"Nothing," replied the mate.

"But good heavens! They might mean the chief mischief? I've never seen such a bunch."

"Let them try," the mate grunted. "I'm thinking they would run at sight o' him."

"That's all very well," Davis persisted. "The chief's away just now, and it's up to us to do something, and up to you to suggest it. You know them. You're in with the chief more than I am. You——"

"Have you had your supper?" interrupted the mate.

"No."

"Then away hame and get it, and if thae three come back, refer them to me."

Davis glared at the old man, who calmly proceeded to unlay a strand of his rope-length.

"'Yet thy co-man-dee-ments observe, with my whole heart will I,'" gabbled the macaw.

"You and your precious bird!" snarled Davis, and bounding furiously to his feet, he stalked from the house.

He could not but be furious. He had felt that evil had come to Carn, that his chief was threatened ; he had rushed off to Stewart, to take counsel with the man who knew his chief best, and to devise means with him for warding off the menace ; and first a raucous bird, galleried atop a high-backed easy chair, had succeeded in making a highly dramatic situation highly absurd ; and then a dour, uncommunicative old man had converted his most astonishing interview into a paltry affair of a visit from three cadgers, who apparently had once known Big Jim. This was the impression that Stewart had given him. He was woefully disappointed.

Hence a great part of his fury ; and this he admitted quite frankly to himself as he hurried along the dark road to his home : his incurable romanticity had been excited again, and again had led him astray. He had expected much on no good grounds. Instead of allowing himself to become obsessed by the idea that those three men were men come out of Big Jim's past with evil intent, instead of playing up to them, up to—as he thought—some great mystery, he should have insisted on knowing their business, and then either ordered them out of the office, or given them the little assistance that no doubt they had come to ask. Very devoutly he hoped that Old Stewart would not give him away to Big Jim.

Had he not been so utterly mortified, he might have noticed and wondered at the darkened state of his home, and at the unusual stillness that met him as he crossed his threshold. And had he noticed and wondered, with the aid of the revolver so ready to hand in his breast pocket he might have been able to put up something of a fight against his aggressors. They took him completely off his guard, and as soon as he had closed the front door.

A powerful arm came from behind him and fastened round his neck in an embrace that nearly choked him ; a powerful hand was pressed over his mouth, stifling his still inarticulate cry of alarm. His arms were seized, his knees were pinioned. Deft hands swiftly searched

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him and removed from his pockets all that was in them ; his shirt was torn open and he was felt for a belt or locket chain. Then up he was lifted and hurled into the darkest depths of the hall, hurled against a grandfather clock that stood in the neuk of wall and stair ; his body crushed it ; it collapsed on top of him as he fell stunned to the floor. And the whole occurrence had taken place in no more than thirty seconds.

In less than that time he had risen, staggered to the front door, and looked outside. Yet the night was still ; and his house was still. His aggressors had vanished. He closed the door and switched on the master switch that lit every light in every room. . . . His home had been treated as unceremoniously as himself, and searched as systematically. His carpets had been torn up, the upholstery ripped from his chairs. Every lock-fast place had been smashed open, every drawer pulled out and emptied, every article of furniture moved—much of it shattered. And in the kitchen, seated as though asleep, was his mild old man. For a moment Davis thought that he was dead.

“Gregory !” he called out in alarm.

The servant neither stirred nor spoke. To his relief, however, Davis very quickly saw that no great harm had been done him. The man had been stunned by a blow from behind ; obviously taken unawares as he sat reading by the fire. On a couch that he made up on the floor Davis laid him. Then he telephoned for the police. After he had hung up the receiver an idea occurred to him. He stood thoughtful for a moment or two. Then he took the instrument down again and telephoned for Old Stewart.

Stewart arrived first. By that time the servant had recovered, and was able to accompany them over the house to view the damage. What talking was done, was done by him—Davis was waiting for Stewart to speak, and watching the mate closely the while. But he was still waiting, nor had he learned anything from his

watching, when the police arrived. Their ring took Gregory away to admit them. Stewart spoke then.

"You'll say nowt o' these three visitors o' yours, Davis," he said abruptly.

"I thought as much," exclaimed the undermanager. "By Jove!" He surveyed the mate wrathfully.

"You'll say nowt.—Mind!" Stewart repeated.

"Why?"

"Take it as an order from *him*."

"Oh, really!" the undermanager countered ironically. "And what about the others who saw them—the gate-man, for example?"

"He was the only one who saw them, and he has his orders, too."

"*Already?*"—Davis stared. There was greater significance in that strange visit than he had been thinking. Not only had Stewart known what his three visitors wanted, but—— "Do you mean to say you knew those three swipes were going to call on me?" he exclaimed. "Is this another——?"

"That's enough, Davis," Stewart interrupted; and Davis was silenced, so peremptory was the tone, so great his surprise at it: surprise at learning that, as well as Big Jim, Old Stewart was a master-man.

The police had entered before he had recovered himself. Without a word to anyone, Stewart went away. Davis could not help watching him go. A gaunt, mysterious old man he looked—almost sinister. Evil the undermanager sensed now, and mystery; it was the dawn of the sinister days. Not the slightest doubt had he but that the furtive men who had visited him, had visited his house also. To what purpose? There lay the most sinister shadow of all. His house had been burgled; but except for what had been taken from his person as he was held helpless in the hall, nothing had been stolen. . . . Everything had been *searched*.

The police left him, their investigations completed for the time being. He and his man made some order out

of the disorder, and slept. And sinister as the night had been, far more sinister was the morning. Carn looked startled. Its folks whispered to each other dire news.

Davis heard the whispers on his way to the office. How he reached there after the hearing he did not know, nor could he remember when he arrived. A host of horrible doubts and fears had laid hold of his soul. Thought of the guineas had returned. In the centre of his consciousness, their evil glamour tinting the whole field, they lay blood red. . . . During the night the three strange men had been murdered in their hotel.

5

All morning he sat in his chair. He did not go home for lunch, nor did he send for any. In the afternoon the police inspector called. He kept the inspector waiting a long time. He was afraid. Before he admitted him he went into his chief's room, and from the hospitality cupboard drew and drank the biggest drink of whisky he had ever seen drunken, and chased it down with a drink of water in order to hasten the spirit's effect. The traces of alcohol he cleansed from his mouth by chewing four asperin tablets for a little while. Then, only, did he give the order for his visitor to be admitted. It was well he had so fortified himself. The inspector's first words after his courtesy greeting were ominous.

"You were late in arriving home last night, Mr. Davis," he said. "Would you mind detailing your movements from the time your staff left the office?"

"Certainly, Inspector," Davis replied, and very calmly he gave the required details: how he had worked late in the office; how he had gone to Stewart's lodgings on a business matter; how he had then gone home. He noticed the inspector covertly checking his times by some data in his notebook; other enquiries had evidently been made. Something was suspected; the inspector's words

and attitude hinted that. He,—he himself,—was somehow under suspicion.

"Have you missed anything yet, Mr. Davis?" was the inspector's next question. "You could trace no loss last night, and your man has informed us that you had noticed nothing missing this morning?"

"That's the case, Inspector," admitted Davis.

"Except, of course, what was stolen from my pockets," he added.

"Then did you have anything in your possession that anyone might particularly desire to steal?"

"Not that I know of."

"And you were not expecting anyone particular to come and see you?"

"No."

"And no one came to see you last night?"

"No."

"You are perfectly certain, Mr. Davis?"

"Perfectly certain."

It was the inspector who seemed to be becoming uncomfortable; Davis made his denials without change either of countenance or voice.

"We have reason to believe that certain persons intended coming to see you, Mr. Davis."

"I was just about to ask you what all this was leading up to," Davis rejoined. "Who were these persons, and what was their object in coming to see me?"

"They were the men who were murdered in the Roxburgh last night."

The inspector looked hard at the undermanager as he made the statement, and he made it with all the accentual stresses, and impressiveness of manner, of one who hoped thus to perturb another and to see signs of his perturbation. The statement, however, had been expected, and he was disappointed.

"You will have heard of the murders, sir?" he added uncomfortably.

"Oh yes. . . . But this is very interesting, Inspector?"

Very coolly Davis regarded the policeman.

"Do you mean to say," he continued, "that these poor devils said they were coming to see me?"

"They enquired for you, and where you stayed, and where these offices were, and then left the hotel presumably to come to see you."

"And instead burgled my house, attacked my servant and me—is that what you are driving at?"

"It might look like that, sir. Only——"

"Only what?" enquired the undermanager sharply as the inspector stopped. "Only what, Inspector?" he repeated, more sharply still.

The butt of the inspector's pencil collapsed between his teeth. He emptied his mouthful of debris into his handkerchief and seemed deliberately to prolong the operation; he had grown desperately uncomfortable. A good-natured, none too intelligent man, he had owed his promotion to the very great courage and promptness of action displayed by him in situations of personal peril when a policeman and police-sergeant in one of the roughest dockside stations in the country; and the dual crimes of the night before, with all their mysterious and sinister circumstance, he was feeling quite beyond his abilities to tackle successfully.

"It's a curious case, sir," he said slowly, picking at the desk with the crushed butt the while.

"Well?"

"And a very unpleasant one for me, I do assure you, sir. We have always got on well——"

"My good man," interrupted Davis indignantly. "Are you daring to suggest that I staged that burglary myself?"

"I wouldn't exactly like to say that," replied the inspector doggedly. "But it's a curious case, sir, as I said before, and your answers to my questions have not been satisfactory."

"Oh?—You had better explain that, and better explain it quickly, too."

"The explaining is up to you, sir, I'm afraid, and sorry I am to have to say it."

As he spoke, the inspector glanced out of the window—a quick, nervous, involuntary movement, the significance of which affected Davis sub-consciously, and involuntarily also he glanced in the same direction. A few yards away, directly in the inspector's line of sight, men evidently awaiting his signal, were two policemen.

"Good gracious, Inspector!" he exclaimed in amazement. "You have never brought these men here to arrest me?"

The inspector looked at him squarely, but did not speak.

"Whatever for?" Davis continued.

"I hope you will realise, sir, that this is a most unpleasant——"

"Yes, yes," Davis interrupted. "Come to the point. —Whatever for?"

"Don't interrupt me, sir," said the inspector gently—he was of a very different type to his predecessor, Inspector Symons. "I want you to understand that I came here prepared to help you all I could, and I am prepared to help you now. You are not a criminal. I can't believe you guilty of any crime. But you are implicated somehow in the events of last night, and you have been fogging me, sir. You have not been frank with me."

It was too true an accusation for Davis to feel any resentment, and the kindness of the inspector's manner kept him from attempting any bluster.

"Tell me how I have been fogging you," he said quietly. "I'll be only too pleased to give you all the information I can."

"Then why did you invite those men to come here, sir?"

"What men?"

"The men who were murdered."

"Me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good God, Inspector! I didn't invite those men to come here."

"You advertised for them, sir?"

"I did not. . . . What an extraordinary accusation to make against me!"

"Then how do you explain that, sir?"

Out of his notebook the inspector took a slip of paper and handed it to Davis. Davis took it; stared at it; his mouth opened wide from astonishment. He could not speak. The slip was a cutting, a portion of the advertisement column of a German newspaper. One of the advertisements, the one that immediately caught his gaze and held it, ran thus:—"SPANISH JIM can be found by his friends, c/o Davis, Shipbreaking, Carn, Scotland."

It was long before Davis was able to speak, so astonished was he, so dumbfounded and yet so enlightened, so horribly enlightened.

"I have never seen this advertisement before," he said at last. "I did not insert it. Whoever did, never asked permission to use my name, nor warned me that it was being used. I know absolutely nothing about it, and you will never be able to trace it to me."

6

The sincerity and certainty with which he spoke would have been conclusive proof of innocence to one far more prejudiced and possessed of a far less trained mind than the inspector—who, moreover, had surely diagnosed at least the astonishment that the undermanager was feeling, for he had been watching him closely; the worthy man was genuinely relieved. He had always held the shipbreakers in high respect.

"I am very glad to hear you say that, sir," he said sincerely, "and I accept your assurance. It did give me a bit of a shake-up, though, to find that advertisement on

a murdered man, taking into consideration all the other circumstances. But it was nothing to the fright I got when you denied all knowledge of him and his pals. You see, I made no doubt that they had come to see you, and never dreamed that you would deny it. That put me all wrong. I ought to have shown you the cutting right away, and I'm very sorry I didn't. I'm afraid the case is more mysterious than ever. I was expecting a lot of help from you. You won't know who Spanish Jim is, I suppose?"

"No, I don't."

"Of course not, or you would have told me. It won't refer to Mr. Martin, do you think?"

"I don't know, but I scarcely think so."

"He is Big Jim? You have never heard him referred to as Spanish Jim?"

"Never, Inspector, and I've known him, and known of him, a long time."

"It's a pity he's away just now."

"Yes, I'll be very glad when he comes back. He may be able to explain a lot, though I doubt it," said Davis, and he spoke with a world of meaning in his tones that the inspector was completely unaware of: Big Jim would need to do a deal of explaining before he, Davis, stayed any longer with the firm; his loyalty was already almost strained to breaking point.

"Who are the men, Inspector?" he asked. "Have you been able to identify them?"

"No, sir. They registered as British subjects. Vincent, Greataway, and Johnstone, skipper and mates respectively, and they told the manager of the Roxburgh that they had come to re-officer a ship they expected here soon. But that was all spoofo. They were here for something else. Not a single agent or broker knows anything about them."

"Haven't they any papers?"

"Not a single personal belonging of any kind. It's a very strange case, Mr. Davis. Everything was taken from

them. Their rooms were searched just the same as your house was—searched down to the floorboards, every bit of furniture dismantled. I can't help thinking you were lucky, sir. They seem to have been knifed as they slept. I only got that cutting by what I might be permitted to call a fluke. It was inside the leather of one of their hats, which happened to have been left in the hotel cloak-room."

"Jove!" exclaimed the undermanager a little eagerly. "It almost looks as if their murderers were the same people as attacked me."

"It does, sir."

"If only I could think so," the undermanager muttered.

"What's that, sir?"

But the muttered wish had not been meant for the inspector's ears, nor had it reached them.

"I only said it was beyond me, Inspector," Davis explained.

"And me too, I doubt," the inspector candidly admitted. "I'll see Mr. Stewart, of course, and perhaps Mr. Martin will be able to suggest something when he comes back, but otherwise I've only got one line of enquiry. Every stitch of clothing these men had was split-new. That's significant, sir. It was bought in Hull two days ago—a complete new rig-out. I have sent word to the Hull police and asked them to try and trace them, but I don't think I am far wrong in putting them down as foreigners who had landed there, and bought the clothes to disguise their nationality. I expect they were Germans."

"And members of the *Nidar's* old crew," thought Davis despairingly. "I beg your pardon?" he said aloud, as he just caught the last word of a question the inspector had put to him.

"I asked if you had any friends, any acquaintances in Germany, sir?" the inspector repeated.

"None that I know of, Inspector."

"And you can't think of anyone likely to insert that advertisement?"

"I can't."

"They must have known you, sir?"

"That's evident. But I don't know them—at least, I don't know who they are. Tell me!—At what time were the murders committed?"

"They were discovered at 8.30," replied the inspector. "Doctor with them 9.5. Doctor said been dead at least ten hours. That puts the time two hours at most after your summons to us last night," he continued, looking up from his notebook from which he had been quoting. "Perhaps they were being committed while we were with you, sir."

"Good lord," muttered the undermanager.

"It is rather gruesome when you think of it that way," remarked the inspector.

But Davis had been thinking of something else—of a sinister old man walking away through the wreckage of his home, and of the evil he had then felt impending.

The inspector slipped the elastic over his notebook, put the book in his pocket, and rose.

"Will you come and have a squint at the bodies now?" he said. "It will be a bit ghastly, but I am afraid you will have to see if you know them. You might know them, sir. I hope you do."

"I hope I don't," Davis muttered. "It's too nasty a business altogether for anyone to want to be mixed up in."

He went with the inspector because he saw he must. He recognised the three dead men, but he said he did not know them. They had been killed as they slept, stripped, and tumbled out on to the floor when their beds were searched. . . . It was a ghastlier, far more horrible sight than he expected. He left the hotel; white and sick he was, but angry, furiously angry, and he went in search of Stewart, and Stewart he could not find. It was almost as though the mate had expected his visit, and was keeping out of the way.

Through the yard the undermanager went, searching

and enquiring. What he meant to say or do to Stewart he had no clear idea; he only wanted to confront him. Horror and rage had made him temporarily insane. He felt the guilt of these three men's death on his soul; he had been used to lure them to their doom, willy-nilly incriminated in his own eyes, in the eyes of the Law—he had had to lie to clear himself; to deceive an honest, kindly man. Somehow he had been represented to them as the possessor of one of Adrian Angell's guineas. They, the possessors of the others, had come to Carn to get it, had come to him, had searched his house, himself; and themselves had been searched, and murdered that the search might be the more thorough—and that Billy Mataala might be avenged.

This much of the evil whirl into which he had been sucked was plain to him. It had been plain to him earlier; since ever he saw that advertisement. He had felt the hand of his absent chief directing all things. But he was rushing at the visible source of the evil, at Old Stewart, to come to grips with him, to declare his hostility, somehow to force his release, ere the onrush of things carried him on and down into greater depths of evil. And still the mate kept out of his way.

He heard of him here, and there, and further on; he threaded and re-threaded the yard with his wanderings. But not in the offices, not in the sheds, not aboard any of the stranded hulks did he find him.

At last he stood on the beach, gazing out to the roadstead, the only other place where he thought Stewart could be. In front of one of the smaller piers he stood, its lofty forehead, rank with sea-growths, towering close behind him. He was exhausted now, and a little giddy from the effect of his huge draught of whisky; and the tide out, the foreshore tangy, nausea was threatening him. He felt that soon he would require to lie down. He gave up his quest—and saw Stewart. His quarry had turned and silently come on him. In a single instant he was confounded, abashed, and subdued. Twenty feet

above his head on the brink of the pier, immovable, implacable, a tall, gaunt, terrible old man, the mate stared down at him, challenging, daring. . . .

Davis walked round the pier, up the beach between the hulks, and so reached the yard.

"Mr. Stewart has just gone down No. 3 Pier, sir," a foreman told him.

"I've seen Mr. Stewart," said Davis, and walked on.

On to the offices he went, sat down in his chair, and dazedly drew his work to him. He had not dared to accept that challenge, nor to speak. He had been warned off, and in no uncertain way—he did not dare but acquiesce. Whatever was happening was in the hands of men who would brook no interference from him. There had been no mistaking the menace, the mercilessness, the purpose of that stare. So he worked, and worked well. There was nothing else for him to do. And thereafter he lived in an incredible world. The evil closed on him as the number of the sinister days grew. He was watched night and day.

Unseen eyes took note of his every movement. Unseen feet followed him everywhere. He only felt that the eyes were on him. But he *heard* the feet.

Along the road behind him after nightfall they sounded, always stealthy, and sometimes very near. Sometimes bushes rustled as he passed them, touched though they were neither by him nor by any night air. Birds flew suddenly from their resting-places in his garden and disturbed his sleep with their alarms. In the morning, in the soft mould beneath his trees he saw strange foot-prints. For the watch was not of his imagination. It was real.

Yet only once did he seek to come to close quarters with his watchers; then, with one of them who had followed him close home; and then only because of Gregory his servant.

Soon after he entered, Gregory had begun shutting up the house for the night; he had gone to bring in the

doormat. A soft-footed old fellow and very sure-fingered, he had approached and opened the front door without a sound, and on the doorstep was the watcher, unmasked before he could steal away, bending down as though his ear had been to the keyhole. The old man's cry of alarm, his hasty explanation, sent Davis rushing out, revolver in hand. And a bush by which he paused listening, had whispered to him harshly: "Get back, you blurry fool." Whose the voice was he did not know, but Stewart might have spoken, so quickly he obeyed. . . . And all the time Big Jim stayed away.

Then the guineas blazed out again.

Late one evening, happening to glance casually at the local weekly, the second issue since the murders, and purchased by Gregory that afternoon, he saw the following heading, heavily leaded and prominent:—

"STRANGE TALE OF GRAVEN GUINEAS

"A MYSTERY MAN"

He grabbed up the paper and read.

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"A man of mystery died a day or two ago in a city nursing home," began the article, "and before dying told a strange tale, which should have more than a passing interest for the people of Carn, inasmuch as for some little time he was one of us, being employed as a breaker at the local shipbreaking yard. Some weeks ago he was picked up in a state of collapse on the highway by a medical man from a neighbouring town who desires to remain anonymous. This Good Samaritan took him to his home and tended him, both for humanitarian and professional reasons, the poor fellow being in the last stages of a deadly tropical disease of which his benefactor at one time had made a special study. Later he was removed to the private hospital of a well-known specialist,

also interested in the particular disease. Here, in spite of all attentions, he died.

"From his story it appears that at one time he was the possessor of the plans of a buried treasure," the article continued, "which, curiously enough, were engraved on several guineas——"

Then Gregory came in.

"That is plastered all over the town," he prattled, seeing what his master was reading. "Great days for the local rag, to be sure. Last week our burglary and the murders. Now this. Did you know the man referred to, sir?"

"No," snapped Davis. "Shut up."

His interest was feverish. He devoured the article, read and re-read it, and read it again, and then sat staring at the headlines. It was an astounding development. It was the story of Adrian Angell's guineas told from another point of view.

This dead man had been the possessor of the guineas, and had hidden them aboard his vessel—all under white-lead and paint, one in a storeroom, the others in the skirting above and outside of the storeroom door. Out of gratitude he had tried to tell his benefactors their whereabouts. They had thought his tale but the ravings of a dying man, and had given it scant attention. Apparently he had been unable to make the name of the vessel plain to them, nor even that she was a German man-o'-war, and he a German. And out in the estuary, not two miles from where the article had been printed, she was lying—the *Nidar*, with the rest of the guineas still aboard!

The man was Spanish Jim!

He had got wind of the firm buying the gunboat; he had come to Carn and secured employment in the yard to await his chance of recovering the coins; he had advertised for his friends. "C/o The Undermanager" any one of the employees might have his letters addressed; it was a privilege definitely recognised by the firm. Being

a stranger, he had subscribed himself "c/o Davis," making the mistake of translating title into name. And evidently a reply had come for him. Those three strange men, his friends, had expected to be known. Who then had received it? Was it thus that they had been betrayed?

Davis thought so. The mystery heaved in his mind, and shadows fell away from it. But many remained; many darkened. It almost seemed as though he were suspected of having found *all* the guineas. Why else had his house been searched? Why else had his supposed robbers been searched? Why else was he watched?

He could give no answer to these questions; he wasted little time in trying to answer them. One other that had suggested itself, kept pressing for all his attention. Had Stewart seen the article? Did Stewart know?

He wondered if he should communicate with the mate, and wondered long. Not since that meeting on the foreshore had they spoken to each other. Very, very unwilling he was to approach the old man now; besides, he had been warned not to interfere.

Yet he felt it is his duty to do so. He telephoned. Stewart was out. Stewart had gone away from Carn for the day. That information settled much for him, and made his further duty plain. He put on his hat, and set off to the yard; he meant to go out to the *Nidar*—and alone. And he hurried. Something had happened; to someone the development was known. For the watch on him had been removed. For the first time for several days he walked along a darkened road without hearing the stealthy footfalls, or being conscious of the watching eyes.

It was very dark by the waterside, and very quiet; the sea was calm; a chill had taken the air and filled it with dampness, and though no fog was down, the estuary was void, no stars showing, no moon, the lights of the ships on the mooring station blotted out. He had to

feel among the clutter of small craft for the boat he desired—a light dinghy, the fittest bark for him that night. For the ebb was making, the estuary promising a mill-race tide; the waters were chuckling among the piles. The dinghy fell off sharply as he shot it out of the shelter of the piers. Before half his pull was done, the current was violent, and he was pulling a strong port oar. The lights of Carn were growing dim then; not yet had the *Nidar's* riding lights appeared. He was beginning to feel a little nervous; presently he would be in darkness, left without guiding marks, afloat in a cockleshell, on a tremendous tide.

Presently the darkness closed over him, blacker than he had feared. He pulled powerfully, his nervousness increasing. Eerie the creak and girn of the rowlocks sounded, the sharp hiss and crunch of the waters beneath the thrusting bow. The wail of a startled seabird made him think of those watchers, and wonder if it were their warning call.

If evil they intended, now was their time, and he thought he heard the creak and croak of other oars, and the sound of another boat approaching. Then the glimmer of the *Nidar's* riding light appeared, and the fancies left him. Spurting, he closed. No watchman challenged as he came alongside, and he did not hail. Unchallenged, he climbed aboard and crossed to her engine-room hatchway. But there he stood listening, stopped by a sound. . . . From the estuary, unmistakable, was coming the creak of oars.

A little while he stood motionless, sensing into the darkness. Surely he located the boat's position, and its kind. Further out in the estuary she lay, less than a cable's length distant; she was standing by, her crew merely pulling to hold her against the tide. Someone had come aboard from her, or was coming. He stole swiftly down to the dank, dark, silent engine-room.

All was still there. But it was a hostile stillness, suggestive of lurkers—which affected him not at all; he

had felt the presence of lurkers in an engine-room before—crazy or vengeful firemen, waiting with lumps of coal. They had never waited long.

A very different personality he was as an engineer at sea. No one was surer of himself. An engine-room was his kingdom where he yielded to none, his battle-ground where he had waged long and triumphant war with both man and sea. He moved quickly forward to achieve his purpose; yet his foot struck no obstacle, instinctively he avoided every one of the multitude of contrivances in his path; and he made no sound.

Along one side, about the two-thirds height of the compartment, was a gallery, reached by a stair at one end, passing on to the ship at the other. It served the storerooms, three in number; and in front of it hung sliding chain tackle for the lowering of their stores. To its edge, near No. 2 storeroom, a ventilator shaft had once been braced; but the shell which had ended the *Nidar's* raiding career, had burst in the engine-room and broken the shaft off several feet above the brace. The chain tackle hung in front of No. 1. The door of No. 3 was near the doorway through which the gallery passed on.

All this the light of Davis's torch revealed, as, from halfway up the stair, he suddenly flashed it on and sent it blazing round the engine-room, his object the unmasking of any lurkers, most of whose possible lurking places his position enabled him to command. But he saw none, nor heard any suspicious shuffle at the bursting forth of the beam. He drew it off from the hunt, and focussed it on the skirting above No. 1, and a point which had been exercising his memory ever since his reading that article was promptly decided: he had not searched the *Nidar* as thoroughly as he had thought. He saw four paint blisters above the door. The other guineas were there.

Up the remainder of the steps he went bounding, the light flaring out in front of him. He reached the top, took one eager step forward—one.

Fortunately it was his sound foot that he advanced ; his other could not have borne the sudden upward and outward jerk that he gave. For he flung his light from him, flung himself sideways off the gallery, leaped forward and clutched the lowering chains, so violent the effort, so violent the check, that his revolver hurtled from his breast pocket and fell the length of the engine-room away ; but he did not hear it fall ; his feet banged on the floor-plates the instant it clanged, so swiftly he slid down the chains ; and he only discovered its loss, when, shelter behind an engine reached, he sought to use it—sought to use it on that intruder, for whom the unseen boat was standing by.

He had seen him the instant he reached the top of the stairs. The beam of his torch had raked the gallery with its mounting turn, and lit up the doorway through which the gallery passed on ; and there, protruding a little from the inner darkness, was a rising arm and a hand that gripped a revolver which was being brought to bear on him. . . . Stealthily in his shelter he felt for the weapons whose possession would make him reckon little of that revolver. He found them. Noiselessly he backed clear.

Over his head his right hand poised while carefully he slewed his position, then forward it snapped. Flung with all his old skill, its target high up on No. 1 storeroom door, a spanner whistled through the darkness. There was a thud, a cry of pain, a clang as the missile rebounded and struck the gallery floor, then the sound of a heavy fall ; he had difficulty in restraining a triumphant exclamation, for he had caught the intruder where he had expected him to be, and laid him low as the man was in the act of reaching up to the prize.

For a moment or two he waited, listening. There was no sound. Exultantly he stole forward, reached the steps, and started to climb, another spanner held lightly at the ready in his grasp. The weapon was suddenly jerked out of his hand and his exultation changed to

fright and dismay. A terrible grip fastened on him. He was dragged back and held helpless. The tables were turned. A desperate effort that he made to free himself only made the grip tighten. He squealed in pain.

"Gad!" came an exclamation, muffled but familiar, and the grip was instantly taken from him.

His antagonist was Big Jim.

Almost the same moment, Old Stewart's voice broke out from the direction of No. 3 storeroom, sounding a sharp alarm.

"He's through the ventilator, Jim," he shouted. "Up on deck and head him!"

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Heavy feet crashed through and out of the engine-room, banged upward through the ship, pounded across the deck, and fell still by the starboard rail. Thither someone had been pursued, someone who had dived overside, the splash of whose body in the water, Davis, used to the varying sounds of the sea on the outer side of a ship's skin, had surely detected in the midst of the noise of pursuit. Through it all he sat dumbfounded, crouched up on the steps, his head in his hands. He had been warned not to interfere; and he had interfered very badly—spoilt some ploy of Big Jim and Old Stewart, just as it was about to meet with success. Yet as the din ceased, he rose and did a thing that Davis, undermanager of Carn, would do: he broke open the paint blisters above No. 1 door—and found that no guineas were there.

Sounds broke out on deck again; heavy feet shuffled and thumped. A boat was swung out and lowered. A motor banged its starting signal, picked up its true running note, and went snoring away from the ship's side.

He rose and made his way on deck.

The launch was circling; no sound came from the boat that had been standing by.

But the launch found her as he reached the rail. A sudden steering order called out by Stewart, and the snore ceased; there was the crash of two boats coming violently alongside each other; then snarls and curses, the rattle of stretchers, and the thud of blows.

An uncanny tumult to come so suddenly from the darkness! As uncanny the silence that as suddenly fell, as instant the doubt who had won. Hard he listened and stared. Then the motor banged.

Away from him, straight over the estuary, went the launch, the snore swiftly receding and falling. Harder he listened. Stirring things were being done. To a low purr the snore fell. Ere the distance smothered it entirely, it stopped, cut off sharp. A moment or two of silence, then out of the darkness again came the din of contending men.

Fiercer this second tumult, though he heard it more faintly; far more men were engaged. The thought of his chief hard pressed sent him hastily aboard the dinghy, and furiously he pulled to give what aid was in his power. And maybe he pulled a mile, maybe two; he did not know. It was almost too much for him; the estuary had fulfilled its promise, and the mill-race tide was running; only the ferocious din, growing more ferocious as he drew nearer, kept stimulating him to the effort required. Yet the conflict was over before he arrived. He found himself closing on a small schooner, lying at anchor in the fairway, yet without lights of any kind.

The launch and a lifeboat were alongside of her. He brought up by the boat, his painter round a thole. Four men sat in her bottom. They glared at him. One of them cursed him.

Nor was the schooner the silent ship that he at first had supposed. Men were cursing softly on her deck and groaning. From below sounded a racketing as though men were searching her hull.

He stood on a thwart and looked over her low bulwark into her waist, and saw by her mainmast, only a few

feet away, seven or eight sitting men—the men who cursed. The men who searched came on deck as he looked—Big Jim and Stewart; the cursing ceased as they appeared. Their masterful figures stalked forward through the gloom. Snap! went a slip stopper. They had slipped the cable. It splashed into the water like a liberated eel, and the tide began to take the schooner towards the sea. He got down, cast off, shipped his oars, and rowed for the yard. Little need there had been for him to go hurrying to the assistance of such a pair! He had seen that night what their past had been, and how they had made themselves names. And dear he seemed likely to pay for the object lesson, for he could not hold the dinghy to its course. The ebb was sweeping him seaward. So spent was he by his strenuous pull to the schooner, he could scarcely have made the yard that night even on the slack of a tide.

He heard the launch start and come snoring towards him. A chorus of curses and jeers burst out behind her—the beaten crew grown brave after the departure of their vanquishers; but she held steadily on. Unwilling though he was to ask for assistance, he had to choose between that and becoming a castaway.

"Sir! Ahoy, sir!" he called, as she came abreast. She bore up on him, and slowed.

"Who's that?" called his chief.

"Me, sir," he replied meekly.

"Take his painter," he heard Big Jim growl to Stewart.

"Gi'e us your rope," the mate grunted harshly to him.

Tied up behind them, he was towed to the yard.

They had not invited him aboard; they did not speak to him all the way in, nor when the landing stage was made; they went ashore without a word, and left him the tying-up to do. He saw that his interference had been taken very ill. They had made him feel an outsider, a being of a different world—a miserable world.

Yet a light in Big Jim's room took him thither when

he came from the pier ; and there they were. He felt more miserable still, infinitesimal by comparison, a thoroughly mean man. Yet he stayed, fascinated by what he saw. Stripped to the waist they stood, binding each other's wounds. Frightfully mauled they seemed to him, stabbed, gashed, and bruised all over. A gash several inches long on Big Jim's shoulder, he saw Stewart sew up as coolly as if he were sewing a round seam. They were gigantic men ; gigantically muscled, gigantically imperturbable. When their surgery was done, they put on their bloodstained clothes and went away.

" Goodnight, Davis," Big Jim said.

" Goodnight, sir," the undermanager replied.

Stewart ignored him.

Davis was neither surprised nor aggrieved.

He had sinned woefully in the old man's eyes, and he realised his sin. The old man had seen what had been in his mind these many days ; he was justly indignant that anyone—especially a companion—should think that two such men as Big Jim and himself could ever descend to knifing sleeping enemies.

9

Big Jim came to the office next morning and resumed occupation of his room. Quarter of an hour later, evidently summoned, the police inspector arrived and was shut up with him for about an hour. Whatever their conversation, however, the inspector garnered nothing from it to help him in his quest, as a remark passed by him when he was going away, enabled Davis to learn ; and thereupon the mystery entered on what to the undermanager was its strangest phase. It ceased to be ; the sinister days came to an abrupt end. The business went on, Big Jim did his work, Big Jim and Stewart spoke to him as though the mysterious happenings in which they all had been involved had never taken place. And this

state of affairs continued for about ten days. Then Big Jim came into his room carrying a spanner.

"What's your trick with this, Davis?" he asked, holding the tool out to the undermanager.

"Which trick, sir?" Davis enquired.

"How do you throw it?"

"So," said the undermanager, taking the spanner and illustrating, keeping it in his grip, however, the while. "It's the turn with the wrist that does it, sir, and the snip with the fingers at the same time."

"Let's see you hit that knot," said Big Jim, pointing to the one blemish in the connecting door.

Davis threw.

End on, the spanner struck the knot, punched it out of its seating, and followed it through the door into Big Jim's room.

"That's very neatly done," remarked Big Jim, "and means a new door, I doubt. It's a useful accomplishment. Come through. I want to talk to you."

Davis accompanied him.

"Ay," said Big Jim, noticing his air of expectancy. "I'm going to clear up a few things that have been worrying you recently. You have seen that, I suppose?"

He pushed across his desk to Davis the German paper in which the Spanish Jim advertisement had appeared.

Davis nodded.

"I inserted that," Big Jim stated. "And to clear away any wrong ideas you may have——! I inserted that article in the local paper, too."

"I thought as much, after the rumpus aboard the *Nidar*, sir," said Davis. "Not before, though."

"It took more than you in," said Big Jim, "as we hoped it would. Spanish Jim was never near Carn. But he was a member of the *Nidar*'s crew, and he hid the guinea you found."

"How did you find him, sir?"

"I'm coming to that."

"You'll remember we seemed properly up against it

at first," Big Jim continued. "We were. But when we came to make enquiries about the *Nidar*, we discovered that she had been captured as a result of a rather significant accident. The commander of the cruiser who did the trick never knew he was anywhere near her, and would never have known, only he happened to pick up one of her crew—a man who had packed a lifebelt on him and jumped overboard—and so got the hint. That man was Spanish Jim. He had been mauled pretty badly by the screw, and died soon after he was got aboard, but he lived long enough to mutter his name—his nickname, rather. And that was all we had to go on. . . . It was all we wanted."

"Was his name on that list you got, sir?"

"No. We knew nothing about him. He was possibly a genuine member of the *Nidar's* crew. We know nothing about him to-day."

"Then how did you connect him up?"

"Pretty big jump we made, you're thinking?"

"'Fraid I am, sir," admitted Davis.

"Well, it wasn't. He fitted our facts exactly. Man, Davis, just consider! Supposing you had packed a lifebelt on you and were going to jump from a steaming ship, where would you jump from?—Over the stern, wouldn't you, where the slip stream from the propeller would carry you clear of the blades? Of course, you would. You would never go over the side. The lifebelt would keep you from swimming properly, or from diving clear. You would almost be certain to be dragged into the screws. Do you follow me so far? You would know all that?"

"Rather."

"Well, so would Spanish Jim. Yet he got mauled by the screw, which means he went over the side. Why?—Because he had to. He hadn't any other choice. He was being tackled by someone. He was being tackled by the man from whom he had stolen that guinea. Do you get that?"

"You said it had been stolen twice, sir," said Davis doubtfully.

"I had no doubt about it whatsoever, Davis. Why was it hidden at all? Why was it hidden so carefully? You thought that queer yourself. It should have been safer in the man's pocket? He must have known that it wasn't safer, that he was suspected, and might be searched. Mind you, I don't say it was stolen aboard the *Nidar*. I reckon the man who had it first came aboard later as one of her volunteers. And the man who stole it from him tried to bluff things out and found it didn't work, and found he had to clear. He was Spanish Jim all right. As I said before, he fitted the facts exactly.

"Anyhow, that's how we reasoned, and we inserted that advertisement to see what it would bring, and it worked.

"Those three monks who came to see you were his pals. They were on that list. We knew *them* soon as we saw them. They had used him to diddle another man—the man who got cooped up with him aboard the *Nidar*. And this man saw our advertisement also, and came to Carn——"

"And murdered them?"

"And attacked and robbed you as well."

"By Jove, sir. So that was it?"

"Yes. He was a man named Gratz—a hound, who ran a schooner with those other three, and did any dirty job that came along. The four of them murdered Billy—watched him die through twenty-four hours, and then started on his son. And then they started cheating each other. That's treasure-hunting, Davis. It's always the same."

Davis flushed a little under his chief's shrewd gaze.

"We put that watch on you—Stewart and the dozen or so of our old hands who are sailing with us still," Big Jim continued. "I was living aboard the *Nidar* all the time I was away. And we put it on partly to guard you, partly to catch Gratz if he made another

attempt to get what he thought you had. That was him at your door that night when your old doctor man raised his hullabaloo. He got away. We had to try him with that article. That was him aboard the *Nidar*—— ”

“ When I came along and put my foot in it,” interrupted Davis apologetically.

“ You didn’t,” Big Jim assured him. “ You caught him such a nasty smack on the head with your spanner that he sank almost as soon as he went overside. He was found this morning, a mile below the yard. I shouldn’t worry. You merely anticipated the Law—to put it very mildly.”

“ I’m not worrying, sir,” said Davis. “ The beggar was going to shoot me.”

“ So Stewart told me. . . . And that’s about all. Isn’t it ? ”

The undermanager took the query as a challenge.

“ I don’t suppose it’s any good me complaining about being kept so much in the dark ? ” he growled.

“ I don’t think you have much to complain about,” Big Jim said calmly. “ We had to put your name to that advertisement. To put Stewart’s or mine—— ”

“ I don’t mind so much about that, sir,” Davis interrupted. “ But I think a lot of what you have just told me might have been told me sooner.”

“ We didn’t know how this affair was going to go,” said Big Jim grimly, “ and we didn’t want to involve you. And in any case—it wasn’t any business of yours.”

“ It nearly landed me in prison—to mention only one thing.”

“ You would soon have been landed out again. A far higher authority than Inspector Michie was behind us all the time.”

“ We’ll leave it at that,” Davis muttered. “ I know it’s not the slightest use me talking. I don’t mind telling you, though, sir,” he added, “ I was thinking all sorts of things about you and Stewart, and nearly away from the firm over the head of them.”

"We wouldn't have let you go far, Davis."

"That's all very well."

"We wouldn't, Davis. . . . Anything else?"

"Yes. What did you search that schooner for?" Davis demanded bluntly.

"Because it was the first time we knew he had a schooner, and we wanted to make sure he hadn't somehow managed to reach her."

"It wasn't to find the other guineas?"

"Good gracious, no. He never had them."

Big Jim put his hand in his breast pocket, and drew thence four coins. He laid them in a row, one by one, on the desk. Davis gaped at them—at four graven guineas, on the first the arrows that he had already seen there, on the others, figures and diagrams.

"Those are Adrian Angell's guineas," said Big Jim.

Davis continued to stare.

"Where in all the world did you get them?" he slowly asked at last.

"Where you found the first."

"Stewart went aboard that day while——?"

"He did. He telephoned that he had found them just before you went."

"Oh, by Jove!" exclaimed the undermanager in great vexation. "And you let me go on searching all that time?"

Big Jim squarely met his angry gaze and beat it. "Yes, I let you," he said a little roughly. "You needed a lesson, and you got it. If you hadn't been so tarnation keen to get your hands on those guineas, you might have heard a lot more."

"Stolen gold never did anyone any good—neither those who stole, nor those who found," he continued sternly, as the undermanager made no attempt to take advantage of his challenging pause. "There's a curse on every bit of it, that I've seen work out time and time again—disappointment, blood, and bitter enmity. A man has only a right to what he can make, or earn by

honest service. . . . Look at these," he added abruptly, pointing to the guineas. "They are only an illusion. There's no treasure."

"That's a bit startling, sir," said Davis, the last trace of vexation gone before his surprise.

"It was lifted years and years ago, probably centuries ago—possibly by someone whom Adrian Angell trusted, and who did him down for the gold. That's what killed the poor devil who fitted out the *Merrymac*. He had put everything he had into her, only to find the stuff gone—and next, Billy—and next, the swines who killed him."

Abruptly Big Jim swept up the guineas and put them back in his pocket.

"They will go to sea with me next trip, I reckon," he said, "and I reckon they will go overside."

10/2/20
Rhwan Iwan

CHAPTER VI

THE OLD MEN OF CRAA

I

IN the hut of the old men on the island of Craa, Davis, Stewart, and twenty men, all castaways, laid themselves down to sleep. Its walls built of granite, roofed with timbers of old ships, niched in the cleft of a cliff that kept it from rain and all the winds that blow, the hut was snug and sound; they had found wood in plenty and lit a great fire; moss litter lay thick on the floor; warm and at ease they slept the sleep of mariners, utterly wearied by a long struggle with the sea. And an hour afterwards, at midnight, a slimy, dripping Thing came up out of Craa fjord and lay down beside them.

Davis felt its presence first. He awoke with a howl and rushed outside. Behind him, twenty howling men fought each other through the doorway. Stewart came last; and he remained in the doorway, looking back into the hut. They stole up behind him and took nervous peeps inside, the more bold giving place to those emboldened by their example. All saw. The glow of the fire illumined the place, redding out the darkness from its most obscure corner. But no Thing was there.

Stewart turned, angered.

"What for did you waken us up like that, Mister Davis?" he asked stiffly, and the undermanager felt no resentment at the tone; though his fault had been involuntary it was nevertheless a fault—he, an officer, had been the chief sinner in the panicking of the men.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Stewart," he answered humbly. "I'm afraid I had a go of the nightmare."

"And what was the matter with you yins?" the mate demanded, addressing the crew.

No one answered him.

"It's perambulators you served your time in, I'm thinking," he grunted contemptuously; and he went into the hut and lay down in the most comfortable place by the fire.

Only Davis followed him. The others drew off a few yards, and there slept the night through. Davis soon joined them. The Horror had not gone. As he slept again, it had touched his cheek with a slimy hand, and he could not remain. Such things happen to seamen. Thus are they warned where ogreish deeds have been done.

Thus the men from Carn spent their first night on Craa, and felt the first breath of the terror of the haunted isle.

2

Coming so soon after the murders in the Roxburgh Hotel, the finding of Gratz, suspected a victim of foul play, had caused such a sensation in Carn, and the making of such persistent enquiries among the yard employees by Inspector Michie, that Big Jim had thought it wise to remove Davis for a period. He had lately purchased a ship that had been mined and beached in outlying waters. The *Hirondelle* her name, a fine new vessel before her accident, he hoped to repair and refit her, and to superintend the making of the temporary repairs that were necessary before she could be brought to Carn, he gave it out that he was taking Davis north with him—a good excuse that proved a very good reason; for a storm had arisen that would have tried the soundest vessel when, Big Jim, aboard the salvage tender, Davis with Stewart

and the twenty men, aboard the *Hirondelle*, they were returning to Carn; and so well and truly had the repairing been done, she remained afloat until Stewart had made Craa and steered her into the fjord; she had settled down soon after her crew had scrambled ashore. . . . Hence their presence on Craa as castaways. As the dawn was creeping in, Davis awoke, stiff and sore, and so stupefied with cold that he lay for a time not knowing what had happened, nor where he was.

Sheer behind him the cliff rose; right and left of him were other cliffs as sheer. They were very high. He was in a pit of darkness, though the sky was lightening; except for a greying a mile away, where was the entrance from the sea, the waters of the fjord lay black as ebony. This was the island of Craa—a hairpin of cliffs with a steep narrow beach at the bend, where he lay—a haven set in the midst of the sea—nothing more.

Not fifty yards away, in ten fathom of water, the *Hirondelle* was lying. As he peered around him, his eyes gradually accustoming themselves to the strange gloom, he saw her white trucks and the tip of her funnel, all that was visible of her above the water, and he remembered the events of the night before. He looked quickly towards the hut. The red glow of the fire was still filling its doorway. Rising at once he hurried thither, yet carefully he had to step over the dank, slabby rock which was the beach, and he did not waken any of the crew. Now that his weariness was gone and his brain clear, he felt ashamed; yet he was anxious about Stewart. He reached the hut and poked his head within. The mate lay by the fire, on his back, knees up, his head pillowed in his palms, newly awakened, an old man rested and warmed. His eyes twinkled a little as Davis stole woebegonely in.

"Any sign of the chief yet?" he enquired.

Davis shook his head, and cowered into the warmth of the fire.

"He'll no be long now," said the old man. "He'll

pick up the channel wi' the dawn. You'll soon be gettin' away."

"How did you know your way in?" Davis asked of him instantly.

"I came in once before."

"And who stayed here?"

"Two old men."

"Good lord!" Davis muttered. "What were they doing in a place like this?—Do you know?"

"Bidin'."

"But what were they doing?"

"I don't know, Davis," said the mate, rising to a sitting position and seeming to slough some of his customary dourness with the motion, for he continued speaking without the need of further question. "They were queer auld buddies. They barred the hut against us, and never gave one o' us a word. But they did us no harm, so we didna interfere wi' them."

"What was that that came in last night?" Davis asked abruptly.

The dourness descended on Stewart again, and he shrugged his shoulders for reply.

"You felt it too—I could see that. What was it?" Davis insisted.

"I don't know," replied Stewart.

"But it was something?"

"Ay, it was something. But the least said about it the better. It bides here."

"D'ye mean to say it was here all night?"

"Ay. It went out just before you came in."

"Are you serious, Stewart? It really was something?"

"Ay."

"Jove, you weren't frightened," Davis murmured. "I simply couldn't stick it."

"It doesn't do to show yourself frightened o' these things," said the old man seriously. "They grip you if you do."

"Grip you?"

"Ay, grip you. Them things do."

The mate was serious, and Davis too impressed to smile. That slimy touch on his cheek, besides, had been very real.

"I've never had an experience like it before," he said. "I didn't believe that they happened."

"They happen," grunted the mate.

"But we were very tired last night, Stewart?"

"Ay. And tired men see queer things at times," the mate admitted. "But there are other things that men who arena tired *feel*. I kent there was something wrong here soon as I stepped ashore. There's their things," he added, pointing to the various articles of use and wear with which the hut was stored. "But where are they? It's many a month since anyone was here."

"Do you think that is what drove them away?" Davis asked him.

"Mebbe. Mebbe it's one o' them. . . . You'll be telling him that she will be easy lifted, will you no'?"

"Yes. It will only take about a week."

"Then we will be hearing more o' them, I'm thinkin'," said the mate. . . . "And that's him now."

The blast of a syren had come echoing in from the sea.

It awakened the crew. They heard them stirring and rising, and then talking together. Their voices were hushed: there was darkness still in the fjord, and their fear of the night had not gone away. The syren spoke again, more loudly, its sound a direct bellow, not as before, a re-echo from outside.

"He's in," said Davis.

The crew began to cheer.

"Ay," said the mate, rising.

A few minutes later, they were aboard the *Rattler*, the salvage vessel, telling their tale to Big Jim.

Davis it was who started to do the telling, and first he told of the *Hirondelle*.

"We'll only need to tack her up a bit as she lies, sir," he concluded. "Then a balloon or two in her holds will lift her so as the pumps can suck her dry."

But when he began to tell of what had happened in the hut, Big Jim looked to Stewart, and the mate had to finish that part.

"I've heard of these two old men," Big Jim said at the end. "They came here nearly forty years ago, and no one has ever found out what they came for, what they were doing, or who they were."

"I've heard tell they were murderers escaped from Norway," remarked Stewart.

"I've heard that too, but they weren't," replied Big Jim. "At least the yarn goes that all three Scandinavian Governments sent a boat here with police representatives aboard to have a squint at them, and they weren't known. And they did no harm to anyone here. They even went out in a little lugger they had, and rescued the crew of a smack that had struck the rocks at the entrance. . . . That's a ferocious passage in, Stewart. Had I known what it was like last night, I would have taken you all off and let the *Hirondelle* sink outside, rather than let you take the risk of it. Were you sure of getting in?"

"I was sure," Stewart replied. "And the *Hirondelle* is ower bonny a boat to let slip into a thousand fathom."

"Ay," Big Jim agreed. "I think I'll keep her. But I'm glad I did not try to follow you in, as I had the mind to do. The *Rattler* is about as handy as a tub. We'll get rid of her, Davis, after this trip."

"What about the old men and that smack, sir?" asked the undermanager, anxious for his chief to resume his tale.

"I was coming back to them," Big Jim assured him. "They rescued the crew, and ran them to their port on the mainland when the weather moderated—a round trip of near four hundred miles."

"They didna want anyone else on Craa besides themselves," said Stewart. "That's why they did it."

"That's true enough," agreed Big Jim. "But they could have let that crew drown? . . . I have heard it said, too, that they were the priests of an old religion that used to be practised here. Craa was a very big religious centre, you know, Davis, long before Christianity came in. . . . You noticed that the Obelisk was down?"

"I did," replied Stewart, to whom the query had been addressed.

"What obelisk, sir?" asked Davis. "Good lord," he added, turning irritably on the mate. "If you knew so much about the place, why didn't you tell me when we were talking about it?"

The mate deigned no reply; and before anything else was said, he had risen and left the saloon.

"The irritating old devil!" muttered Davis. "Jove, if you and he have been sailing as long together as you say, I'm not surprised——"

The undermanager stopped, a little confused.

"You are not surprised that I am tarred with the same stick," said Big Jim with a smile, completing his sentence for him. "You are getting over your fright, my man, and I'm glad to see it. I want you to go down presently, and see what the *Hirondelle* needs doing."

"What about the Obelisk, sir?" Davis growled. "I'm interested in that."

"Yes, it is interesting," admitted Big Jim, ceasing to smile. "It was an Egyptian obelisk, Davis, almost as big as Cleopatra's Needle, and it stood on the highest bit of the cliffs, which is right above where we are lying now. I'm a little surprised that an expedition was never sent to find out what it really was. No one seemed to know anything about it before the war, except a few fishing and whaling folk. It was a rare navigating mark. I expect the Germans or ourselves knocked it down because of that. Or maybe it blew down. It must have been standing an enormous strain up there. It's remarkable that it managed to stay up so long. They made a fuss about the raising of the Embankment

Needle, but Gad! the folks who hoisted and anchored the Obelisk must have been real engineers."

"They must indeed, sir," Davis agreed. "I would not like the job to-day, even supposing I got every gadget and all the men I asked for to do it with. Craa must have been a very big religious centre to explain all the trouble taken. It's just the place for hellish rites of some sort or another. That was an echo of them last night. The place is haunted. I'm not going ashore again. I don't like the job of going under, either."

"That's all rubbish, of course," said Big Jim sharply. "There can't be much wrong with the place, or these two old men couldn't have stayed in it so long."

"They're away now, sir?"

"But they would have to peg out sometime? They stayed here forty years. Isn't that enough to show the place is reasonably safe?"

"But if they were priests of the cult practised here? If they were in league with the devils, or gods, or spirits, or——?"

Big Jim was staring at his undermanager, and the latter stopped under the influence of his stare.

"Gad! Davis. What has happened to you?" he asked. "I never thought that I would hear you, of all people, talking like this. Do you know what they would say in Carn if they heard you?"

"This is Craa, not Carn, sir," replied Davis dourly. "And what happened last night has made a difference, knocked a hole in the roof of a lot of my ideas. However, I'm going to get the *Hirondelle* up if it can be done, so don't worry about me, sir. And you can lay on it that I'll get her up the quickest possible moment, too. I want away."

"I'm not worrying about you," said Big Jim gravely. "I'm more concerned about the hands. If you are affected like this, they will be a hundred times worse. And I want the *Hirondelle* up, Davis."

"Stewart is expecting trouble with the hands, sir,"

said Davis. "He didn't say as much. But he asked me if I was going to report her a possible lift, and that is a lot for Stewart."

"Damn Stewart!" growled Big Jim. "He is always raising ghosts. Fact, Davis! They seem at home with him. I wonder what he is doing now," he added, and he rose quickly and left the saloon.

He re-appeared in a few seconds.

"He's ashore searching," he announced disgustedly. "The worst thing he could have done. He has gone and given cabin confirmation to that yarn, and all the hands are on deck watching him, interested as rats in a trap that their old buck is investigating for them. We'll have the divers refusing to go down if we don't get them on the move soon. . . . Breakfast!" he shouted to the steward. "And call Mr. Stewart," he added, as the man immediately appeared with the first of the dishes. "Rout him out. Quick! We are hungry."

Nevertheless the meal was well advanced before the mate appeared.

"The place had to be searched," he grunted, as he came in. "What the hands think doesna' matter. If they willna' go down, I'll put them over the side."

He sat down in his place at the table, drew nearer him the large bowl of porridge that formed his breakfast, and calmly commenced to eat. Whether because of the accuracy of the thought-reading, or from some memory of the old man's treatment of recalcitrant seamen in the past—both notions formed in Davis's mind—Big Jim's irritation seemed to pass away, and he chuckled. But Davis felt annoyed.

"You might have deferred your search till the divers were started, Stewart," he growled. "It will need a better man than you to put their like over the side if they don't want to go."

Stewart made him no answer, which irritated the undermanager more; but he made no further complaint.

"Did you find anything?" Big Jim asked of the mate.

"I did not," the old man answered. "There is no one there, and no sign of anyone having been there for at least a twelvemonth. But I found a way up the cliffs—which I shouldna advise anyone trying," he added. "It's an old way, older than the Obelisk, and no' been used for a fine long time—no' by these two old buddies, I'm certain. And that hole in the cliff where the hut is has been chiselled out, which I knew before."

"Which means it was a bit of some temple or other," Big Jim remarked to Davis. "You should go ashore and have a look at it."

"I'm no longer interested in the beastly place," replied Davis, still ill-tempered and uneasy; nor did he recover his good humour during the meal.

As soon as he was finished, he left the saloon and began the preparations for the *Hirondelle's* lifting; he got out a diving raft and moored it in position; he unstowed the diving gear and superintended its testing and overhaul; he made ready for the first descent, and his irritation lasted all the while. All other kind of mental preoccupation was kept away.

But with diving kit donned, and the depths very near—the depths out of which that slimy thing had come but a few hours before—whither it had returned—he began to be conscious of his surroundings, and nervousness gradually assailed him. His assistants were very quiet. Aboard the *Rattler*, all hands were on deck, and watching him silently: and not only was there the weird happening of the night to explain their silence. Their anchorage was awesome enough—awesome enough to explain the happening. Craa was a beastly place by daylight.

Not more than four hundred yards broad where they were, walled in by cliffs a thousand feet high, cliffs of trap rock of a dark purplish hue, the fjord was a stronghold of the night, whence the last shadows could be routed only about noon when the sun was over the entrance. Its waters were black. Its single beach, unflushed by any honest stream, sedimented by the cliff seepage of centuries,

was like the bank of a disused sewer outlet, or of a colliery settling-tank new-drained, where dogs and cats have been drowned. Green, mouldy grass was the only growth—sea-grass; such other weed there was was dead, brought in from the sea by the slow tidal flow. And not a breath of the gale, still blowing above and without, came down to ruffle its waters. It was a still place—expectantly still; a lurking place; a den. In it, men spoke low. Echoes cackled eerily over their louder utterances, as though high up the cliffs, crazy listeners were hidden—listeners made crazy by Craa.

Yet up on the bridge of the *Rattler*, Big Jim lounged nonchalantly, his cigar smoke rising as regularly as the pressure puffs from a stationary engine running slow. Just as nonchalantly, seated in one of the boats, Stewart was busying himself with a seamanly task—he would have the hands skipping presently on seamanly tasks also; he was biding the proper moment. Nervous though he was, Davis too, showed no sign of concern. It was a testing time. For all their great courage, divers are canny folk, Scottish divers especially. On this first trip below, the fate of the *Hirondelle* hung.

Casually he gave his last instructions. His headpiece was fastened, and down he went; and he stayed down a full hour, working without perturbation, his dread of the depths departed the moment his feet touched bottom and he saw before him the loom of the *Hirondelle's* shapely side. He was on a job of work, and work was a panacea for all his ills and fears. When he came to the surface again, no one took much notice of his coming; his assistants by their attitude were on an ordinary job of work also. And from the *Rattler* rose sounds of toil. All hands were outboard, scraping her sides, with Stewart mixing paint by her gangway, and keeping grim watch over the working parties the while.

"You have done it, Davis," Big Jim congratulated him when he came aboard. "I would have come down with you if it hadn't been so obvious. How is she lying?"

"Dead easy, sir," replied Davis; and he began his report.

The *Hirondelle* had been a ship fitted with a paravane, and the mine which had damaged her had been duly caught by the apparatus and cut away; but unfortunately, before she could steam beyond its danger radius, it had somehow been exploded, and though her hull had not actually been broken, many of her plates had been badly started and strained. Nevertheless, the replacing of these plates was all she required to make her as good as she had ever been. Not having new plates, however, when he did his first repair, he had straightened the old ones as well as he could, and re-riveted them; he had greatly strengthened her bulkheads as well, but for which precaution she would have been lost, as the storm had re-opened all the leaks in her side; she had only slowly filled. He now proposed to close the leaks again as she lay, the Carn salvage outfit having equipment and tools whereby riveting could be done under water. Then up they could bring her, and away!

"We are not likely to strike such weather again in a hurry, sir," he explained. "We don't require to do any more. Her *bulkheads* held!"

"Note the pride o' him," grunted Stewart.

"Well, it's a fact," protested Davis, whose leg was always easily pulled. "If they hadn't, you would not be sitting here."

"It was your job to make them hold," replied the mate dourly. "What are you making such a song about it for?"

"Who is making any song? May I be damned!"

The mate got up and went away, as he usually did when he had no further interest in men or in what they said.

"That looks like his retort courteous for your doubting his ability to put your divers over the side," said Big Jim. "Though it's not like him to take offence over a thing like that. I doubt he is expecting trouble yet."

"He is enough to make it, the surly old bounder," Davis growled. "But I won't be surprised if he is right. I'll away and get the men started while they are in the mood. I saw nothing queer down below, but I don't like the place any better."

The first shift of divers was down within the hour. Shift succeeded shift regularly all day. All night the work would have been carried on, and without need of any urging by Davis, had not Big Jim intervened. He called them off as the shadows were gathering in the fjord. "You have done well enough, Davis," he said to the undermanager privately. "No need to risk spoiling things now." And the first night shift, about to go down, doffed their kits somewhat speedily when the counter-manding order was given.

A melodeon and a fiddle played in the forecastle that evening. From the fireman's quarters in the stern came the strains of the pipes. And every door was shut close, and every port. Never had the lightman done his work so well—the ship blazed with light. With the darkness the dread of the fjord had returned.

Davis slept badly; his door and his port were shut close also, the curtains drawn across his berth. He dreamed of the Thing, and of old men—old men in long white robes who sacrificed whales, and played jingarrings with devils round Cleopatra's Needle; and in his waking moments he felt himself alone.

Near the end of the middle watch he became aware of movement in the saloon. He got up, drew his door ajar, and looked in. Big Jim and Stewart were there, clad as though come from the outside; and their boots were muddy.

"Have you been in the hut, sir?" he asked, coming solemnly out of his berth.

Big Jim nodded.

"Was it there?"

His chief nodded again.

"Ay, it was there," said the mate in confirmation. "We watched for it."

"We felt it come up from the fjord, Davis," said Big Jim quietly. "And I reckon it stood in the doorway looking at us. We had to pass it to get away."

"Good lord, sir," Davis whispered. "You didn't see it?"

"No. I didn't. Did you, Stewart?"

The mate shook his head.

"But you were sure it was there?" said Davis, very greatly disquieted.

"Absolutely."

"Jove, sir! this is simply hellish. We'll have it aboard next. For any favour, give us a drink."

They played chess together for the rest of the night, Big Jim and Davis, Stewart looking on; the under-manager it was who suggested the game, Big Jim without a word complying. At dawn, however, Big Jim ordered him off to his berth, and he slept for two hours. At seven bells of the morning watch he was up and breakfasting. At the first stroke of eight, he led his first shift over the side to the boat that was to carry them to the raft, and he was the first to go down.

3

The morning went as the day before—the work progressing steadily; the divers seemed even more careless of their surroundings. Occasionally, when one or other of them came to the surface, a chaffing remark was flung from the scrapers on the *Rattler*, and was instantly answered. All hands seemed in good fettle. They had slept well. No breath of terror had been able to blow through the closed ports and doors. The carefully-fostered jollity of the previous evening the morning had made real, and the tale of the uncanny adventure of certain of their comrades was now more a possible medium for scarifying others than any source of disquiet to themselves. Yet all forenoon Davis felt uneasily expectant.

He urged on his men, and laboured hard himself. He felt that they were being allowed to work undisturbed only for a time; only until it suited the Thing that lurked its day below to make a move. . . . It happened about noon as the shifts were about to be changed.

For greater convenience he had moored out another raft some distance away from the first, and from this the new shift was preparing to go down. It lacked ten minutes from the change. He had been down below himself, but had come up to superintend; his headpiece removed, he was going over to speak to one of the men handling the upper gear.

The man spoke to him instead.

"Emergency signal, sir," he called, and sharply—such a signal was rare. "Easy, Jack," he bade his mate at the pump; and already he was hauling in the safety line.

"Emergency signal, sir!"—another outfit hailed Davis as he was about to lend the first a hand.

Three divers were at work from this raft.

"There's something wrong, sir," called the man in charge of the third outfit. "We have been signalled too."

All three outfits were hauling in their men, hauling swiftly but skilfully, without any fuss or flurry; it was their work, and they were well trained; no voice had been raised unduly. Unperturbed, the men on the second raft were preparing to go down.

Menzies, the foreman diver, was with them.

"Aren't you a bit too soon, sir?" he called to Davis, becoming aware of the time.

Alarm made Davis deaf.

"Evidently not," Menzies muttered, not liking to be ignored. "Go on," he growled to the shift. "Get on with it. You can show yourselves as nippy as other folk when it's coming near your time."

Which statement would have brought a smart rebuke from Davis, privileged and worthy employee though the

foreman was, had not the undermanager's attention been wholly otherwise engaged. For the first diver was up, and struggling to unscrew his face-piece, the haste of him, the eagerness of his chilled fingers as they tore at the slippery screw, betokening a man badly frightened, or one the bearer of urgent news.

The undermanager forced his hands away, and himself tried to do the unscrewing.

"He has jambed it," he snapped to the other men. "Off with the whole thing.—Hurry up!" he added, as the man began calling out something that either his haste or the muffling effect of the headpiece made unintelligible.

They whipped the piece off. The man's head was revealed. He had continued to shout till the last screw was undone. Excited they stared at him. But now he said nothing—he gaped.

His mouth had opened to speak, and remained open, the words he would have said held back by some surprise; and first he gaped at the undermanager, then past him—past him at the other two divers, brought up and helped aboard, and clawing at their helmets as he had clawed, men as eager and anxious to speak, and men as dumb-founded and speechless, once their helmets were removed, as he himself had been. They gaped at each other, at Davis, at him. Then all three, each in his own way, swore. Each seemed surprised at seeing the others alive and well.

"What do you think is the matter with you?" Davis demanded.

None of them seemed to know how to reply.

Davis repeated the question.

"I am not very sure, sir," the first of them answered. "I thought I saw someone done in down below."

"I thought so too, sir," said the second.

"Same here, sir," said the third.

"Is anything the matter, Mr. Davis?" came an enquiry from the foreman.

In his bewildered state, the query angered Davis,

and he would have ignored Menzies, purposely this time. But a man beside him suddenly exclaimed:

"Holy Mike, sir! They have seen it too."

Swinging round, he saw the outfits on the other raft hauling in their men; and the shift had only just gone down.

"What's the matter with you there, Menzies?" he called angrily.

"That's what I would like to know, sir," replied the foreman. "It's emergency signal. Is anything——?"

"Get them up and see!"

Up they came; and the undermanager's anger left him as he saw their haste—the same scene acted as before. Each man gaped at his comrades; each had thought some ill had befallen the others. More, they would, or could, not say. Davis did not press them. He knew. The Thing was stirring. Yet without hesitation he bade the foreman get ready to go down with him; and without hesitation Menzies prepared to obey.

"I'll work towards you, Menzies, and you work towards me," he ordered, "and then we will look round together."

His sense of duty left no room in his consciousness for fear; somehow and quickly, the impression received by the divers had to be eradicated, or the *Hirondelle* was doomed to lie for ever at the bottom of the fjord. But once down, his desire for company in those uncanny depths was strong, and as swiftly as he could move, he made his way towards the downfall of the other raft to meet the foreman. Before he had covered half the distance, he was caught up from behind by the safety line and drawn to the surface. And the foreman was waiting him there.

The man's tunic was wet and shiny. He had been down.

"I had you pulled up, and I am thankful to see you, sir," he explained. "I thought something had happened to you."

"Oh hell," groaned Davis. "Are you all gone mad? What did you think was the matter with me?"

"I thought I saw you all limp like," the man answered, a little diffidently. "Seems to me there's another diver down there," he added.

"Is anyone missing?" Davis asked quickly.

"No, sir. It's not one of us."

"Then who the dickens is it?"

"Now you are asking something, sir," the foreman replied, shrugging his shoulders. "But it's what we have all seen."

"Rubbish!" snapped Davis. "If you thought you saw someone, why didn't one of you go and get him, instead of chasing each other up like a lot of frightened kids?"

"It's a gey funny place for another diver to be," ventured one of the other men sombrely. "Looks to me more like a warning, a spook, or something;" and his glance wandered significantly to the beach and the hut.

Several of the men stirred uneasily.

"It's the rottenest job I have ever been on," came in a murmur from one of them—which one, Davis did not notice, though he looked for him.

"We have got to make a search, men," he said determinedly. "Get on your gear."

But only the foreman moved to obey. The others stood doggedly still. They did not believe that the thing below was a diver. Nor did Davis. Yet he glared at them; angry words came to his lips.

"Here's Mr. Martin, sir," whispered the foreman—the raft was swaying, Big Jim already stepping aboard; so absorbed had they all been, they had not seen him come.

"Well, what's going on here?" he enquired.

Davis told him.

"Bring me my diving-suit," he shouted back to the *Rattler*.

He glanced at the divers, and unerringly picked his man.

"You'll show me where you got that sight, Menzies," he commanded the foreman. "We'll soon get to the bottom of this. . . . Here, Davis! You are not going down," he said firmly, as the undermanager moved towards his outfit. "You have been down nearly nine hours in the last twenty-four. You are going blue, man. Take off his kit," he ordered two of the men, who at once obeyed, though rather shamefacedly. "Get it off him. Come along, Menzies."

Disrobed, displeased—and yet not disappointed, Davis followed them to the other raft and took charge of the preparations for their descent. He felt very cold—he had been down too long. But there was a chill at his heart as well. The mystery of the fjord—or its evil—was about to be revealed. He stood at the edge of the raft and watched his chief down until the black waters hid him.

All hands were tense. Aboard the *Rattler* work had ceased. Swung round in their working-places, the men watched and waited. Intent, Stewart stood by the rail, in his half-uplifted hand a mixing-brush, from which the paint was dripping. No one spoke, no one moved except the men at the pumps, who seemed part of the mechanism; the only sounds were the low whinings of the well-oiled bearings, and the hiss and bubble of the air-streams breaking up from below. Davis watched those breaking air-streams, so great the concentration of his attention, that it was almost as though they bubbled up in his mind. From them he could tell whether all was well, whether anything went wrong.

Away from the raft the bubble-bursts drifted. Slowly they went. Carefully the divers were searching. Twenty yards away the drift ceased; the bursts became intermingled.

"They have found something," whispered a man by Davis's side: Big Jim and the foreman were bending down, their heads close together.

Davis nodded, though he was not conscious of making the acknowledgment.

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"Here they come," the same man whispered—the bubble-bursts had moved apart and were returning.

One drew ahead—the foreman.

"Foreman's signal up, sir," called the man holding the safety line, and commenced to haul in.

But Big Jim came right under the raft before giving his signal; the foreman was up before he made it. And excitedly Menzies signalled haste with his unhelmeting; his voice inside his headpiece sounded like a steamer's syren, far off at sea. About him fussed the men, fumbling in their eagerness. But they left him alone when Big Jim came up; left him half unscrewed. A shout arose from them; a shout arose from the *Rattler's* crew. Then the cliffs spoke. Craa howled its amazement at what had lain hidden in its bosom. For Big Jim bore a burden with him, the body of a diver in his arms.

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They took the body from him, and laid it on the raft: a diver dead a long time. His helmet was green—it had been an old helmet, well used; his tunic, once yellow, was green also. But the dress had been stout, and had preserved him. Within the helmet was a face. Big Jim knelt down, and with his pickaxe broke the clouded glasses. They saw the face of an old man.

"It's one of the old men of Craa," he said. "One of the two old men who used to live here," he added, that the divers might understand.

"What's he doing here, sir?"

"Was he floating when you got him, sir?"

"No," said Big Jim, answering his second questioner.

"Then it wasn't him I saw, but his spook," said the man with great conviction. "It was floating upright, arms spread out, head down a bit, and the feet dragging the bottom. . . . Horrid."

"Are you sure?"—Big Jim looked at the others for confirmation.

"It was more a kind of reflection I saw," said one, on whom his glance rested.

"It was a shiny thing—very like a spook," said another; and the other men nodded and murmured their agreement.

"I should not be surprised if it was," Big Jim agreed also, humouring them.

"I expect it was him that came to the hut the other night," said the foreman. "He wants Christian burial, sir. They always do. That's what makes spooks. He will lie quiet if you let us bury him."

"We will bury him outside, Menzies. Will that satisfy you, men?"

Several voices spoke assent.

"That will make things square, sir," said the foreman.

"Then we will see about it at once."

"But what has he been doing down there, sir?" asked the man who had already put this question.

"I don't know," Big Jim replied. "Possibly working on some old ship, and his outfit collapsed. It is old gear, as you can see. Let's see what the end of his pipe is like, Menzies."

A man had trodden on the air-pipe and broken it, so brittle had the sea-water made its material. But the foreman had kept hold of the loose portion. He lifted it up, and displayed the end.

"That's what comes o' diving with bad gear," he said. "See?"

The end was worn. It had been a break, and under water; the whole section was only about a dozen feet long.

"Poor old chap," a diver murmured. "It has been a gey auld suit. Look at the patches on it."

"You fellows are lucky, having the gear you have," said the foreman. "I dived my first year in a suit like that. Lumme!—bubbling all over, and the water up above my knees the first hour."

"He has been asking for trouble, and got what he

asked, I'm afraid," said Big Jim. "The man who sent you down in a suit as bad as that, Menzies, should have been sent down himself with only the weights on. . . . Bring him aboard."

Signing to Davis to follow, he moved towards one of the boats, and they went to the *Rattler*. He was carrying a small, leather bag, much sodden. To Stewart's glance of enquiry as they met at the gangway, he nodded. Without pause they passed on into the saloon.

"Shut the doors—outer and inner," he ordered.

Davis's pulses leaped at the order: the *Rattler* was an excited ship, her crew too intent on what was coming aboard to heed much what was happening in the saloon—or so he would have thought! But quietly he shut the doors, and quietly he sat waiting, while Big Jim briefly told Stewart what had taken place.

"Now, Davis," said Big Jim, continuing, slewing a little away from the mate to include the undermanager in the conversation. "We have got to the bottom of the mystery of these old men, and possibly the mystery of Craa as well—for there was a mystery. There's no doubt about that. That old man was murdered. And I'm sorry to say it looks as though the other old man murdered him."

"How do you know, sir?" Davis could not help exclaiming, though it was obvious to him that Big Jim was continuing.

"Because his air-pipe was cut."

"But it wasn't, sir!"

"It was. It was a clean cut, Davis. I roughed it under water, so that the men wouldn't know."

"And he wouldn't lie quiet," interrupted the mate. "I expected as much."

"Whatever for, sir?"

"For that.—It was slung round his waist."

Big Jim held up the leather bag.

"The same wretched lure," he continued, "that has led men astray since ever value was degraded into price."

He flung the bag on to the table. Its mouth burst open. Out of it poured a heap of big coins, black with age and tarnishing—about fifty of them.

"Treasure trove," he said. "It has been another treasure hunt, Davis."

"Pieces of eight," grunted Stewart. "Gosh! but they must have struck a galleon."

"A Spanish galleon?" exclaimed Davis. "One of the Armada ships?"

"Must have been. What else?"

"Jove, it would come in here for shelter like the *Hirondelle*."

"Ay, and sink like her."

"I wonder how they got to know she was here."

"Possibly it was a tradition in their family, Davis," said Big Jim, intervening in the conversation again; "handed down from generation to generation through three centuries. Anyhow, that is what they have been doing here. That's why they did not want visitors. Gad! They would be young men when they came. They grew old searching. Think of it!—spending forty years here, searching and searching, and growing old. *Here!* Gad, it makes you despair o' man. A lifetime wasted, and ending in crime."

Stewart chuckled.

They both stared at him.

"See anything funny?" Big Jim enquired.

"Ay," grunted the mate. "These twa auld divvels," and he chuckled again. "Bidin' here a' that time," he explained, "and now one left walking here whiles the other one tries to spend the money he stole. I'm thinking he wouldna know he had turned auld."

"That's a devil's joke, Stewart," said Big Jim quietly.

"The de'il cracks some gey guid jokes, whiles," replied the sardonic old man, quite unabashed.

Without saying anything further to him, Big Jim swept the pieces back into the bag and carried it off to his berth, whence presently came the bang of his safe door.

"This has to be kept very quiet," he said, returning. "The hands must not get to know of the murder. I don't suppose they would go down again if they knew."

"They wouldn't," said Davis. "I'm sorry I have to."

"You needn't, unless you like."

"And that would mean all up with the *Hirondelle*, sir, so no go. The divers would tumble to something wrong if I backed out."

"That's the worst of you being such a slogger, Davis. But I am quite willing to leave the *Hirondelle* lying, if you say the word?"

"And that would haunt me for the rest of my days—much worse than anything that I'm likely to meet down below. . . . And I don't suppose there will be anything now."

"Neither do I," said Big Jim, "or I would not let anyone go down again, whether they were willing or not. Quite honestly, I think we have got to the bottom of matters now. There is no Evil of Craa, in spite of the evil look of the place. It has just been the scene of a sordid crime, and the sordid life of two sordid old men. I'm seaman enough to think we can cure what is left o' that by Christian burial outside. Better rush the work, though. No fancy repairing. . . . Stewart!" he said, turning on the mate. "Go and get him sewn up. You will take the boats out, and take as many of the hands with you as care to go—the more the better. I'll stay aboard. And go as soon as you can. The wind has been dropped since last night. It should be calm enough now. . . . Help me off with this kit, Davis."

Stewart departed immediately.

"I think you had better go too," Big Jim said, when the undermanager had rendered the help required. "Yes, go. The trip may do you good; and it will give you a different impression of Stewart, the satanic old death-head that he is. You will come back thinking that he should have been a parson."

5

All hands went to the burying; in four boats they rowed away down the fjord, and Big Jim was left alone aboard the *Rattler*—an irregular proceeding, but one in which he acquiesced, for everyone seemed so keen to go. And in the tumbling waters, a mile from the entrance, they buried the old man of Craa. The longboat was his bier—Stewart's boat. Seated on the middle thwart, his shaggy old head bent reverently down over the prayer-book, the mate read the beautiful service for the burial of the dead at sea. The other boats came as near as they dared, their crews still bearing on the oars. But all heard. He spoke well. Not once did he falter. The service was halfway through before the undermanager discovered that he was repeating from memory, not reading; that his gaze was seldom on the printed page. But he could not help noticing the greater respect for their officer which the men displayed when it was done. He felt a greater respect himself. He felt also that he did not know Stewart, that he would never know him—that the man sunk a thousand fathom beneath them knew him better than he.

They came back singing sea-chanties, and the crews raced each other up the fjord. A few minutes after the race was won, the divers were at work again; and cheerfully they went down. But Davis had not sung, nor rowed, nor even steered. He had not sung because he could not sing. He had not rowed, because there had been no oar for him. . . . He wished he had asked Stewart to let him steer. *That* might have kept him from noticing the awfulness of the contrast between the dank, gloomy inlet and the fresh, sun-bathed sea, and held off the sinister thought which entered his mind the moment they left the sunshine behind. He let Menzies set the divers working. He himself went straight to Big Jim.

"Look here, sir," he said. "Don't think me funky.

but this has just occurred to me, and I don't know whether you have noticed it—that old man must have been murdered by someone below.”

Big Jim looked at him sharply.

“Why?” he asked.

“Because his pipe was cut only ten feet from his helmet.”

“Well?”

“Well, it must have been someone close up to him that did it, someone on the sea-bed as well as himself.”

“Not at all, Davis. Think, man.”

“I have been thinking.”

“Fortunately so have I,” countered Big Jim. “What do you make of that bag of gold round his waist?”

“What?”

“He was coming up with it, of course. The man handling his gear could snick his pipe anywhere he pleased, and let him slip back again.”

“So he could,” admitted Davis.

“There's no difficulty there at all.”

“I can see that now, sir. But——”

“But you thought something else had happened?”

“I did, sir. I felt pretty queer again. I had just got the idea, and brought it straight to you. I am jolly glad I did, too. It's funny how this place keeps giving me the creeps.”

“It isn't funny a bit,” said Big Jim. “It's a sink of a place. It looks haunted—there's no use in shutting one's eyes to that. I believe it is haunted. But take it from me, Davis!—ghosts can't interfere in human affairs as though they were men. The supernatural can't use a knife. And it was a knife that finished that old man.”

“I would like the chance of a word with that other old man,” growled Davis, rising and preparing to go. “I am not concerned so much about what he did to his pal, but I would like to let him know how much I appreciate the trouble he has made for us. The thing to do is

to get the *Hirondelle* away as quick as possible, and then live in hope. Here's for it!"

More at ease, he went to the raft, and down to his men; and another day passed. When the last shift came up, the repairs were nearly done.

He could scarcely realise that so great progress had been made, that the close of another day might see them on the eve of leaving for Carn. A quick job he had expected—and intended, but not one so quick as this; subconsciously the dread of the fjord had been affecting the divers as well as himself, and making them work more strenuously than either he or they had been aware. Yet he passed a bad night. He dreamed that a dead diver came in from the sea and undid all that had been done; that when he went down to drive him away, he found the old man whom they had buried that day, who had laughed at him from the midst of the waters and told him that he would never leave Craa. . . . Someone also cut his air-pipe. It was a horrible dream.

Nevertheless, the first thing he did next morning was to begin getting out the buoyancy envelopes from the *Rattler's* hold. The sight of them made him cheerful. Fitted inside the *Hirondelle* and expanded with air, up they would come—up she would come. He had them sent down immediately, and the first shift placed them in position. All hands seemed exceedingly cheerful: they saw the end. The second shift under Menzies went down to continue the repairs, swearing that they would finish them. Just after six bells, the foreman came up, jubilant.

"They aren't going to finish them, Mr. Davis," he reported, "but they are going to come pretty near it. Another shift. She's repairing herself—closing her plates and simply asking for them to be riveted. There's only about another thirty feet of easy stuff to do. Time for survey, sir. We'll have her up to-night."

"I'll be going down presently," Davis replied. "Start connecting up the piping with the *Rattler*."

He went down about half-an-hour before noon.

It was a very black corner where the *Hirondelle* was lying. Less than fifty yards distant was the base of the highest cliff, and the loom of the immense precipice blotted out what little light of day could have come down so far, even when the sun was over the entrance and the greatest brightness on the fjord. Powerful under-water flares had been lowered, however, and these illuminated the working-places fairly well, though the black waters pressing in all around their cramped zone of radiance gave to the workers the appearance and feeling of labouring in a lighted cave. Well beyond this lighted zone Davis's survey took him. Returning to it, jubilant as Menzies had been, for the work was truly as far advanced as had been reported to him and as sound as he could have desired, he found the places deserted, the divers disappeared.

His jubilation vanished in an instant and a little thrill of dread ran through his frame—merely his soul's start of surprise at the unexpected, however, at his finding himself alone where he had expected three or four other men to be. Quickly he understood what had happened. The change-over was taking place. The old shift had gone up. Soon the new would be coming down.

But with the perception came another and greater thrill, another perception. It was *noon*—the time when, two days ago, his men had come panicking up from below. . . . He nearly pulled his line; nearly signalled out of the depths his fear of them.

Instead, he worked.

More potent than his dread of the depths was his dread of appearing ridiculous; and so he would have appeared, for before coming down he had told the foreman that he would remain until the new shift descended. Therefore he suppressed his nervousness and began to prepare the working-places for their coming. Very carelessly these had been left—the carelessness of a job's end, he knew, yet he felt annoyed. The sight of a heavy

automatic riveter lying on top of a flare made him enraged. He stooped and grabbed at the tool. And it seemed as though his hasty movement had made his dress give way, so cold he suddenly felt; he thought the waters had rushed in on him. . . . Then he knew it was Fear. He felt the Presence. The divers had panicked. He turned and saw what had driven them away. Another diver was coming towards him.

Through the black waters beyond the radiant zone the diver was coming, a being, visible where all things should have been invisible, a form, shapeless yet with shape, a Thing with outspread arms, with head bent forward, with feet that dragged, a pale green, shiny, awful apparition—the spectre of the hut revealing itself,—the Evil of the haunted isle making itself known. In the fjord it lurked. His apprehension had been justified. The destroyer of that old drowned man of Craa was coming to destroy again. It was the Lurker coming out of his ambushade. . . .

Two personalities lived in Davis and made him what he was—a nervous, self-conscious, dangerous, determined man; and in the instant of crisis, the moment of his greatest fear when life in him nearly died, one of them took complete possession, his fear was ousted by as terrible a rage—the rage of the primordial male, the early Man, lifting his head defiantly amid the terrors of the universe, fighting for the right of his species to live in a chaotic world. He drew his diver's knife and prepared to do battle with his foe.

Yet cunningly he weighed up the issues—whether he should advance—whether he should stand his ground?

The black waters offered cover. Where he stood, however, was fine black sand, pressed hard—good footing, such footing as might not exist beyond the radiant zone.

He decided to stand.

Nearer the Thing was coming, slowly, steadily.

Then he changed his plans; a trap had been set for him, and his rage burned more fiercely as he saw it, and

urged him to action. Another antagonist, another diver, was approaching him from behind, a more monstrous apparition, tearing at the waters in its eagerness and rage. He had turned his head just in time.

Forward he went himself, tearing at the waters, moving swiftly to grips with That which had so nearly worked his downfall. It had been intended as the lure while that other thing came upon him in the rear and destroyed; he would make it bear the main attack. And it waited his onset. It stood a pace away and still made no move.

But it moved as he struck, as he buried his knife in its body. Out shot its arms and twined round his neck and shoulders, its legs interlocked with his own. He struck again, again, and tried to free himself; it was dead—it must be dead, yet it clung to him; he could not push it away. And as he struggled, another grip fastened on him, his other antagonist arrived. One backward slash he contrived to make. Then his arm was held. His foes overpowered him. Down he went, down they came on him. Down they held him, though madly he still contended. And then he learned how the old man of Craa had died. They cut his air-pipe. His dress collapsed, and the waters poured in on his head.

6

He rose in darkness, and moved towards a long, thin, upright band of light. It broadened before him as he touched some flat surface, and he stood looking out of his berth into the *Rattler's* lighted saloon. Big Jim and Stewart sat at the table. They both smiled to him.

"Come and sit here, Davis," Big Jim said, making ready a chair.

Stewart got up to assist him.

But Davis needed no assistance. As a sleep-walker he advanced. Like one newly awakened, he sat down

and stared, astonished and startled, striving hard to comprehend.

"Take your time, mun," the mate bade him gently. "Just sit still a wee. It's a' right wi' ye. You'll soon understand."

A blink of comprehension came.

"Did you pull me up?"

They nodded.

"Do you know what happened to me?"

"Let's hear," said Big Jim.

He told them—told them of his fight with the two apparitions at the bottom of the fjord, and he could hardly believe what he told.

"Was it real?" he asked. "Or did I go mad?—have I dreamed it? It's not all bally rot. I saw something. . . . Here! We are not raising steam, are we? We're not clearing out? . . . So it was real? You are letting the *Hirondelle* lie?"

"We sail at dawn," said Big Jim. "Open the door, Stewart."

The mate rose and opened one of the doors. Into the saloon came the throb of powerful pumps, running hard, and the gush and splash of the outgoing streams.

"What——? That's——"

"That's the *Hirondelle*."

"Up?"

"Yes. We are towing her to Carn."

"So I *have* been playing the giddy goat? I'm sorry, sir."

"You haven't, Davis, Anything but! You have solved the mystery of Craa. We were all wrong. That was another drowned diver you saw."

"That shiny thing?"

"Yes. He is phosphorescent. A pretty awful sight, I'll admit. He frightened the divers. They came up yelling. I think he startled you a bit, too."

"I should just think he did!" exclaimed Davis. "He drove me mad. What's he been doing there?"

What is he? What's the mystery? I suppose I only imagined there was another going to attack me. Or is there another? Was my pipe really cut through?"

"Steady up, Davis," Big Jim interrupted. "I'll tell you everything, if you give me time. That other diver was me."

"You? You cut my pipe?"

"I cut your pipe. I had to. You had sliced my dress open. I had to quieten you some way before I could get you up—you had severed your line as well, and with the water in on me, I hadn't too much time."

"Oh lord," muttered Davis in alarm. "I might have drowned you, sir."

"Ay, my man. It was a pretty close shave for us both. But we just managed it. You are a devil of a man, you know, Davis, when your blood is up. I was afraid to let go of you, quite apart from your line being gone. You would have knifed me again."

"I was an ass to panic like that," said Davis contritely.

"You didn't panic like the divers, anyway, though you had been undergoing a far bigger strain than any of them. Don't you worry. I got a deuce of a start myself when I saw that damned awful thing. . . . We got it up," Big Jim continued, "and its air-pipe led us to the whole show. It was attached to something, and we followed it. That old man wasn't murdered by his pal. He was murdered by a boatload of mutineers and sneak thieves, Davis. There's a drowned submarine lying down below—not much more than twenty yards from where you were working all the time."

"A submarine!" Davis exclaimed in amazement. "Not a German, sir?"

"Ay—though out o' German control. We can just make out her number, and she is one of the boats that were supposed to have deserted to Russia at the tail end of the war. Her crew mutinied at sea, and set their officers adrift, and told them that was what they intended to do.

Then she disappeared. She could never be traced. She never went near Russia. She came here. She must have been in here before, and someone in her crew must have tumbled to what the old men were doing, and he would whisper treasure to them, and work them up to mutiny and to come back. And they would come stealing in while the old fellows were at work. Only a submarine could have done it. The old men would never know. A diver out——”

“The blighters! The low-down swine,” Davis interrupted. “That poor old chap whom we fished up would be followed under water till he led them to where they were getting the gold, then—snick!”

“That would be it, I doubt.”

“Jove, robbed just as they were reaping their reward, and after forty years! No wonder Craa seemed such a beastly place with that mob drowned in its fjord.”

“And sma’ wonder that auld man couldna lie quiet aside them,” grunted Stewart.

“I suppose they would murder the other old man, too, sir,” Davis continued. . . . “Or maybe he would never know what had happened? Poor old devil! Think of him bringing up that cut air-pipe, and wondering. It would drive him crazy. Drowning was too good for them. But doesn’t it serve them jolly well right! Without their officers, they would go and make a muck of things. They would let the water in on themselves.”

“They did not,” burst out Stewart, almost exultantly. “No, they didn’t. They did no such thing.”

“What happened?”

“The Obelisk fell doon on them.”

“No?”

“Ay. Crushed them up like a tin o’ sardines, and left that one in the divin’ suit driftin’ about like a wandered herrin’.”

“Is that really the case, sir?”

“It is,” Big Jim confirmed.

"Then it's Craa hitting back. The place was uncanny long before. By Jove!"

"It was the other old man, Davis," said Big Jim quietly. "We climbed the cliff, Stewart and I, and we found him lying up there."

A novel is a work of
fiction in which imaginary
and unbelieved combined together
to express life in the form
of a story.

W. G. Sebald

CHAPTER VII

THE GHOUL

I

NEITHER fear of Mrs. Martin, nor yet of the worthy police inspector, was the cause of the next trip afloat Big Jim and Davis took together. They went to sea simply because they wanted to oblige a man whom they thought deserved obliging—a friendly harbour-master, who, much against his own convenience, and very much to theirs, had allowed one of their purchases to lie alongside one of his wharves for a very long time. At last a note had come from him requesting that she be removed; awkward questions were being asked, and his Board becoming restive. MacArthur and Stewart and all the other certificated men happening to be at sea, south Big Jim and Davis hurried to take over the vessel, an old ex-enemy cruiser. When about an hour's sail from the estuary on their return journey, to the pair, seated in Big Jim's stateroom a chessboard between them, came work of fog.

"Damn," said Big Jim, a master player, just gaining the upper hand in a game started by him, three of his pieces off the board.

"I'm afraid your place is on the bridge, sir," said Davis, hastily beginning to sweep his chief's formidable attack into the chessbox.

"Ay," Big Jim agreed dryly. "You might have kept those positions, though."

But he hurried off, for he was captaining the cruiser,

and had little confidence in either of his mates. They were no regular hands of his, and would never be employed by him again. The whole crew, in fact, were little better than pierhead jumps, the trip having been arranged too hurriedly to allow of much picking and choosing. Davis however, who was acting as chief engineer, had managed to sign on two good men as his assistants. Without the slightest anxiety about what was happening below, he leisurely followed his chief on deck for a squint at the weather.

It was thick and getting thicker fast. Visibility ceased half a cable's length on either beam. But ahead seemed clearer. Either the fog was patchy or coming up astern. He did not wonder at the angry note in his chief's voice sounding down from the bridge. With the home turn so near, the call for the captain should have come much sooner.

He walked forward along the spar deck and leaned over the port rail, his shoulder pressing against the aft bridge-stanchion. Thence he watched the grey close in. Slowly it advanced over the surface of a still sea, that stained its white skirts with deep shadow save where the feathery, glistening line of the bow wave passed through and on.

A curious, hesitating fog it was, more a haze. Long, trembling vapour fingers stretched out from the main mass; the old cruiser was brushing them stolidly aside. Yet it held a menace. A siren bellowed astern. Another wailed an answering note off the starboard quarter. Both from outgoing ships, Davis decided, which had therefore passed. But the blasts carried a double message to him. Hearing his chief come stamping athwart the boards above his head, he backed out from the loom of the bridge and hailed him.

"What's the matter with your siren, sir?" he asked.

Big Jim looked over the bridge rail and growled; he seemed very angry.

"You may well ask," he said. "This blurry mister

of mine only thought of using it when he saw me coming, and he was in such a darned hurry that he jerked the line clean off the throttle."

"By Jove, sir," said Davis with a nervous glance at the grey. "Rather awkward, isn't it? We'll be smothered in half a jiffy."

Without replying, Big Jim stamped wrathfully away.

"Haven't you managed to bend that line on yet, mister?" he snapped at the mate, who was up at the siren.

"Wire almost red-hot, sir," came the muttered answer.

There followed a muffled swear; the man was burning his fingers badly. Out of fear of his skipper, however, he was sticking to his job.

Overhead the grey was thickening. The ship sped on through greater gloom. A mass of chill vapour spumed up the side and engulfed Davis as he went back to the rail. He tried to dodge away into a clear space. But this was no tremorous vapour finger. There was no clear space. The fog had closed. In a twinkling the vessel was shrouded from end to end. Beyond a radius of ten feet everything was a shadow or had disappeared.

Up on the bridge Big Jim's footsteps sounded, the quick sharp footfalls of a man both impatient and ill-at-ease. His was no enviable position, skipper of a ship dumb in such a smother.

"Fore-top, ahoy," he hailed. "Anything in sight?"

"Nothing in sight, sir," the lookout answered.

"For'ard, there?"

"Nothing in sight, sir," came the reply from the bow.

"Keep a sharp watch to port. . . . And you, mister!" he called to the second mate who had just come on deck. "Get aft and keep watch there."

He came to the end of the bridge, and leaned over to port and stared into the fog. After a little while he hunched himself out still further, one hand spread behind his ears as though he were listening for something. Watching him, Davis suddenly felt nervous. An eerie

silence had fallen, through which the ship swished and souged a bare four knots and slowing. He too started to listen.

"Davis."

"Yes, sir."

Big Jim had spoken in a whisper. A loud burst of swearing from the mate made him slew round angrily; but it was Davis who spoke the rebuke:

"Shut your head, you idiot," he whispered harshly, his wrath at the man so stupidly distracting the attention of a watching ship, making him forget for the moment the sanctions of sea law and custom.

Yet the mate ceased his swearing and made no protest against an engineer rebuking him; and when the under-manager turned to glance apologetically up at his chief, the latter merely nodded. The rebuke had been too well-merited for it to matter much who did the administering. Both watches were on deck and uneasy. All around men had shifted and stirred as though jarred by the sound.

In response to a beckoning finger the undermanager swarmed up the bridge ladder. Big Jim pointed to port.

"Have you heard anything out there?" he whispered.

"No, sir," Davis whispered in reply.

"Listen again."

Hand behind his ear, Davis leaned out over the rail.

"Well?"

"I can't hear anything, sir."

"There's something."

Both listened.

Then Big Jim said quietly:

"I wish you would go for'ard away from the engine-room, Davis, and listen there. I can't trust the darned sodgers aboard here. There's something out there. I've thought so for a while, and I'm certain it has started to come athwart us fast."

At once Davis turned to carry out the instruction. His hand never left the rail. High above, in the foretop,

a man yelled out a warning. Like an echo came a yell from the bow. Both warnings unintelligible, the cries of men inarticulate from fear. Yet in between had snapped, Big Jim's ordered: "Hard a port! . . . Quick! man. . . . Hard!"

Master of his ship and of himself, he leaped to the engine-room telegraph. Clang-ang! went his bidding below. Ere the questioning shouts, the clatter of startled feet on the deck plates, broke out that followed the second warning, the starboard engine had stopped working, driven on by the port, checked by full helm, the cruiser was swinging round.

Round to starboard she payed, faster and faster, round and away from her peril. Her skipper's sea sense had not deceived him. What it had detected, minutes and minutes ago, was now snoring through the vapours down upon her port bow.

Everybody heard it; everybody gripped whatever was nearest and waited—everybody except the mate, who chose the intensest moment of all to rattle down from the throttle, his armpit nipping the line. In a mighty blare the siren smothered every other sound. In that moment the peril passed—close alongside, but still hidden. All Davis saw was a mighty bow wave. When the siren ceased there was no sound, save what the cruiser made, pitching and rolling in the troubled sea.

A man burst out laughing forward. Another swore. Then the decks became a babel. Quietly Big Jim brought the vessel back to her course and sent the mates to set the men about their business. Seeing Davis still at the bridge end he crossed to him.

"Well?" he said.

"By Jove, sir!" Davis murmured.

"Ay. It was a pretty close call. Did you make anything of her?"

Davis shook his head.

"Did you?" he asked.

"I think she was a destroyer, going pretty near full

speed," Big Jim answered. "I just saw a bit of her shadow above that wave. I rather fancy we have run into some manœuvres. I've felt several fast craft about. Gad! she would have gone clean through us had we touched."

"It's what I thought she was going to do," said Davis. "You fairly picked the old hooker out of the way. I'd have swung to port and taken that fellow on our bows."

"Ay, and landed yourself for half damages; probably more," Big Jim remarked. "Our siren put us at fault. As long as they know where things are, those destroyer fellows can go full tilt through——"

"What the——?" he began again.

"He has struck something!" exclaimed Davis. "My God! he's blown up."

They raced to starboard and leaned out listening.

There had come the roar of an explosion, its source along the course that snoring stranger had held.

2

Big Jim darted back to the binnacle and took a hasty bearings.

"Port, two turns," he ordered; then he telegraphed for speed.

Quickly the ship swung to starboard again.

"Midships."

"Midships. . . . Helm's amidships, sir," replied the man at the wheel.

"Steady."

"Steady. . . . Steady it is, sir."

Along the course that had taken her to safety the cruiser steamed swiftly to bring safety to others. Before Big Jim could give the order, the mates had started swinging out the boats, ready for any attempt at rescue.

In little whispering groups the allotted crews stood at their stations. But after each questioning blare of the siren all were silent; all listened for answer to the hail. But none came. Thicker and thicker the fog grew. They began to taste and smell the bitter reek of the explosion. Soon it became so dark that objects a yard away were nearly invisible. Big Jim reduced speed. At dead slow they drifted into clearer air.

"We've passed through," he said. "Damn! . . . Round with her," he called to the steersman.

Again they drifted through the murk, and again came to clearer air.

"I've allowed too much or too little for the tide, I doubt," he muttered to Davis. "We've missed them."

He rubbed his smarting eyes and spat the bite from his throat.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

"He has struck a mine and gone down," said Davis. "I'm afraid it's no use, sir."

"Ay. There's a six knot tide running. Anything that survived—Lord knows where they might be now. But we'll try again."

Back they went. But the fog was never so thick as before. Either the reek had spread and thinned, or they had only skirted the zone of the explosion. Once an answer had come to their hail—from an outward bound tramp, however. Big Jim spoke to her through a megaphone. Her skipper had not even heard the roar; he promised to keep a look-out, and passed on. On a course that steamed the tides the cruiser was set, and given speed barely to hold them.

"I don't like going on yet," Big Jim said in explanation to Davis. "This is going to lift soon."

"It's lifting already I think, sir," said Davis. "Unless it's just that we are drifting more out of that reek."

"No. The fog's going. . . . Fore-top, ahoy! Any sign of it clearing?"

"Clearing a bit ahead, sir," the lookout replied.

"Thought so," said Big Jim. "The wind's away north. It's going to blow the very devil."

An air stirred athwart the bridge as he spoke.

"That's the first of it," he said. "We'll be a wet ship to-night."

Davis felt the cold kiss of fine rain.

Another and heavier air stirred, the forerunner of a gust that ripped the fog and left the cruiser bare from stern to stern. In two great slow-moving walls the grey divided and rolled away. Then the breeze tore into it, rent it, and drove it swiftly astern. They saw both sea and sky. Every man on deck sprang to a vantage point and stared around him. But of boats or rafts, or wreckage there was not a sign. Any traces left by that explosion had been carried away by the strong ebb tide.

Eight bells clanged the end of the second dog-watch. The land was out of sight. The sun was setting. Long thin streaks of brown cloud streamed across its face; there was an angry tint in its glare. Northward, bank upon bank of storm cloud was piling. East and south the sky held a cold, hard pale blue. Broad across its zenith was a sickly green light. More ominous still, the breeze had dropped. The cruiser had started to pitch in a heavy swell.

Yet in a wide circle she was set to search the sea, in an endeavour to save the lives that the storm might devour. But the search was fruitless. Passing ships had no news. When the first squall came scurrying out of the northward athwart the advancing night, all that could be, had been done.

Regretfully Big Jim shook his head to Davis.

"I'm afraid——" he said.

"You have done more than most people would have done, sir," said Davis. "You'd better get in by the shortest road you know. We've none too much coal."

"Then it's got to be some dandy dead reckoning," said Big Jim. . . . "Any idea where we are, mister?"

"That fellow just passed could have given us our

bearings," growled the mate, far from pleased at this probe of his seamanship.

He had not the vaguest notion of the cruiser's position ; but Big Jim knew, in spite of all the buffing. Without hesitation he set a course. And when Davis returned to the deck about midnight, after standing half a watch at his kicking throttle levers, although the same course was being held, dim through the darkness and the driving smother of the storm, the southern entrance light of the estuary was showing, scarce a point off the port bow—a perfect landfall.

"And that's no Cape Flyaway, either," he said to the mate, who was standing at the starboard end of the bridge on the lookout for the northern flare.

"He's some skipper," the man replied.

"By Jove, yes. Wait till you see him take her in. It's seldom a pilot and he are aboard the same ship."

The mate had spoken ungrudgingly, any resentment that he might well have been feeling, submerged in his esteem of his skipper's sea-craft. Liking him better, Davis stood by in his company, though he did not speak to him again, not wishing to distract his attention. Steadily the southern beacon drew abeam. At last its twin appeared. Degree by degree course was altered. Plunging and tossing viciously, the old ship backed away from the gale and slowly headed in between the guardian flares.

She listed heavily as the storm broke fuller on her side, though not so heavily as she would have done had a less cunning skipper been conning her. Nevertheless Davis had to cling hard to keep his balance. Even the mate grabbed hastily with both hands at the rail. Big Jim alone did not seem to move.

Halfway down the lee reach of the bridge he stood, erect yet not touching anything. In his storm rig, wet and glistening from the spindrift of the waves spumed up by the canting side, his huge form seemed gigantic. For once his beard was blowing free. . . . His great voices

roaring out his instructions to the steersman, bit into the gale as shrewdly as he brought his ship round. Davis thought he had never seen anything so fine, so typical of the sailor race of Old England. His chief always seemed to look his best at sea, a master mariner, a master man. Somehow he felt very mean and insignificant in comparison—very conscious of his wooden foot. Yet he flung off from his support and braced himself up bravely as he saw Big Jim, the turn completed, come striding across to starboard. He little guessed what was being thought of him. Big Jim *always was* his best at sea, most keenly appreciative of the worth of his men.

"Been below, Davis?" he called. "Thought I knew your touch on her. She's been kicking her stern clean out every fourth or fifth wave, and never raced her propellers once. Man, for a Welshman, you're not such a bad engineer."

"Had to save all the steam I could," Davis growled. "We're mighty short of coal, you know."—The commendation might almost have annoyed him; but he no longer felt insignificant and mean.

The mate crossed to lee and took up the position vacated by his skipper.

"That fellow's learning to be a sailor," said Big Jim approvingly. "Bit of a blow, isn't it?"

He looked aft at the turmoil out of which the cruiser was steaming; both guardian lights were well abeam; the shelter of the estuary was almost attained. But the gale had increased. Squall after squall was crashing out of the night, heavy with spindrift and rain; heavy with whole wave crests, that hurtled as high as the fighting-tops, their parent masses smashing over the bulwarks in furious pursuit. It was as though the storm were delivering its fiercest onset, striving yet to destroy them on the threshold of their sanctuary. Yet by far the greatest fury raged seaward, whence came a continuous roar, the bellowing of a monstrous herd of monsters in conflict, the thunder of the ocean's stampede before the

wolves of the wind. The flashes from the guardian lights peered out on a terror scene, peered out and flinched and fled from what they saw.

Big Jim shook his head solemnly.

Davis nodded.

Speech was impossible, and needless. Each knew the other's thoughts. In that howling waste had long ago perished any surviving that explosion who had not been picked up.

A little while longer they stood together, staring astern and wondering; then Big Jim turned to go. As he turned a wave thudded heavily amidship. Not the heaviest wave of that night. Though the vessel canted sharply, Davis easily kept his balance. But to his surprise his chief seemed to be overthrown by it. The big man lurched past him. Caught by a flying arm, he was toppled over and nearly flung down the bridge ladder. Only a desperate clutch at a stanchion saved him. He pulled himself upright, turned quickly to spring to his chief's assistance. . . .

Big Jim stood by the wheel, conning his ship round. He had rushed thither, not stumbled; and what had made him go in such haste—what he had seen, Davis now heard. Like a drum beat of the storm fiend's orchestra, dulled by the din, but distinct and familiar, came the sound which had followed the rush of the destroyer across their bows—the roar of a second explosion.

3

Plunging and tossing and rolling more violently, the cruiser turned and drove into the storm, the northern light fair above her bows. A sea poured over her forward, churned along her deck, broke on the bridge bulkhead, spumed up and drenched the bridge with its spray. She but lifted her prow out of the welter, smashed down her forefoot on a greater wave, sent the spray thrashing

above her funnels, and crashed on. A gallant old craft she was proving herself, though a wet one. Soaked and chilled, Davis leaned far out over her side, and searched the sea for what she sought.

In a flicker from the lighthouse he saw it, about a mile away, just within the northern arm of the estuary—an inward bound freighter, down by the stern, the waves breaking over her, helpless, doomed, her after part blown away.

While yet the flicker lit the scene, her stern went down still further, stamped under by the sea. She disappeared. The waves breaking over her merely ceased to break. She passed like a shadow, submerged in a greater darkness. Davis closed his eyes and thought of those who had seen light for the last time; the flicker had died, and the strongest swimmer could not live in such a sea.

Sick and awed, he left the bridge and went down to his engine-room. Nothing could be done to save those so suddenly cast away. Yet from the motion of the ship he knew that Big Jim was searching for survivors. In the same way he knew that the search had been vain; the course became steady; less and less violently beat the waves. The cruiser was steaming up the estuary, and nearing the quieter waters off Carn.

At last the bridge telegraph began to clang the welcome news that the end of the trip was near. Soon the thunder of the racing cable shook the ship, and the anchor was down. Rolling ponderously, she swung off to the wind. As she took on the steady forward rise and fall of a ship moored, her moorings pulling her true, he drew the fires. His men sneaked on deck immediately afterwards, plain what was in their minds. When sounded the squeal of sheaves, the bump and scrape of descending boats, ill-swung out and badly fended off from the sides, he was not surprised. He had noticed that after the second explosion the riff-raff deckhands had nearly panicked. The men below had been worse; he had had to drive them. They

were deserting in a body. Their contract finished, they would not stay a minute longer aboard the ship that had given them such a voyage.

He sent his assistants to their berths, and himself watched the pressures down. He felt stale and depressed. Somehow thought of the *Eckler* had entered his mind, and as he sat four steps up the ladder to the control platform, his memory faithfully reproduced the scene in her engine-room; the scene that day MacArthur led them down to show them the greaser, stabbed and dead by her condensers. What had been in his subconsciousness all along, now expressed itself in his unuttered wish that the last of his chief's big purchase of war craft had been brought ashore and picked clean. He had never liked those old enemy ships, their silent alleyways, their empty spaces, their dark nooks and corners so laden with suggestions of the one-time presence of eager foes.

With a slight shudder he rose and went on deck. Big Jim had already gone ashore. "And the hands followed as soon as he was out of sight," the mate informed him; which meant that besides the man and himself, there were only his two assistants, the other mate and the two stewards on board. An empty ship—one still more hostilely suggestive! Miserably he changed his clothes, and went up to the bridge to await a boat being sent from the yard. There were none of the cruiser's boats remaining, or he would have put off immediately. He felt hurt and annoyed that his chief had gone, leaving him behind.

Nor was there anything in the outlook to cheer him, though day had come. The light showed a high tide, just past the full, washing over the harbour front of Carn, and he shivered; so dank and desolate the town seemed under its low-lying pall of rain clouds, the tide seemed newly to have withdrawn from its streets, from washing even over its housetops.

Already the cruiser was beginning to show the effect of the turn. Her stern was being swung nearer the shore by the receding waters. Half broadside on to the waves

she was rolling uneasily, although the gale was not so strong. And with the swing his vista altered. He looked out on to the estuary and saw a steamer passing, on its way to the sea. Idly he watched her.

"Poor devils," he muttered as she passed on and a swirl of the rain mists hid her.

Then the thought in his mind forced a full expression :

"I would not like to be on her," he added.

"Here's the launch, Mr. Davis," the mate called to him.

"Thank Heaven," he muttered, and turning, saw the little craft plunging boldly out from between the piers.

Then it was as though a ghostly hand touched his shoulder. His blood seemed to become cold. He felt the breath of another disaster ; he heard another roar, and slowly he looked round, dreading what he was to see.

He knew what he expected.

Yet when he saw, he could scarcely believe. The steamer was going down.

Shattered by the force of the explosion, the rain swirl had fallen from her. She was down by the stern, the sea sweeping to her bridge deck. Even as he gazed, her bows rose higher ; she rolled half over on her side. There she hung for a brief interval. In that interval two boats were lowered. He saw them fill with men and draw away. As though she had been waiting till they cleared her, she turned clean over and disappeared.

Into his frozen field of vision dashed the launch, a darting centre of foam and spray. She was racing to the scene. Quickly she covered the distance, and slowed. But she stayed by the boats ; the whole crew had been saved ; there was no need of searching. Gladly he made the deduction. Yet his sense of disaster did not pass away, and his earlier gloom was deepened. Ill-luck seemed to have come to the estuary. He looked around on the bleak scene in the midst of which he floated, and wherever he gazed he saw tragedy folding her wings.

The launch took the boats in tow. Strung out behind

her they passed between Carn piers. In a little while she reappeared and headed for the roadstead. MacArthur was steering her. "All saved," he shouted, as he came alongside. The mates, the assistant engineers, the stewards cheered; but in silence Davis climbed down.

"You won't want to go to sea in a hurry again, will you?" said MacArthur in attempt at pleasantry to relieve his gloom.

"I won't," said Davis sombrely. "Have you heard?"

"Rather. That crew of yours have been spreading some tophole yarns. But you seem to have had a hell of an end up to your voyage—lucky to get in, in fact."

"Jove, yes. Do you know anything official?"

"It's mines, I hear. There's no end of a panic developing. That steamer got one amidships, so her skipper told me. The chief looks as if he had more news. He is sitting in his office grave as the last day."

"No wonder," said Davis.

As he stepped ashore the demoniacal sea broke over the landing-stage and drenched him.

4

Big Jim was pushing away the telephone instrument when the undermanager entered his room. He asked concerning the fate of the steamer's crew. "I thought so," he said, when told all were saved. "Devilish business, isn't it?"

"I have heard about the other two also," he continued. "That freighter we saw sink by the northern light had fifty-two of a crew. Fifty-two, Davis, and only one man got ashore. Cargo iron ore, and down she went. They hadn't a chance to lower a boat, poor devils. The other was the *Athene*, that third-class cruiser that has been lying down at the Base so long. . . . No. Not the craft who crossed our bows," he said, as Davis would have interrupted him with a query. "She didn't blow up.

She was one of the destroyers in attendance. They were closing on the *Athene* on account of the fog when we came along. Lucky for her they were. She sank in a couple of minutes, and they were able to take off all her crew. Several were hurt, so they cleared off immediately. That's how we missed them. Gad! The Admiralty have the wind up properly about the whole affair. A new minefield has just started to break up, and the storm is completing the job."

"I should just think they ought to have the wind up too," said Davis indignantly. "At this stage of the Peace it's scarcely good enough having an unswept minefield so near a busy estuary like Carn."

"It's pretty stiff," Big Jim agreed. "Can't understand it. The sweeping has been pretty thorough."

"Will there be any compensation going for the relatives of that freighter's crew?"

"I doubt it."

"Then it's a downright scandal, sir. Those mines should have been located long ago."

"It's been a biggish war, Davis."

"Anyone knows that."

"Well, anyway, the Admiralty are getting busy now," said Big Jim, bringing the discussion to a close. "I'm away along to the Board of Trade to pay off that darned crew. You had better go home. It has been a most unfortunate voyage, and I hope the trouble is finished. Gad! I hope we don't get any more mines up here."

"I hope not," muttered Davis.

But the hopes were vain; the trouble was far from over. In the lower estuary, mines were sighted next day, the strong tide-run bringing them swiftly in from the sea.

They were quickly detonated by machine-gun fire, a flotilla of small craft having already been hurried to the danger area, a close watch set, and a search begun, despite the storm. Several days passed, however, without the minefield being discovered, and each day

more mines were seen in the estuary and over a wide sector of the neighbouring coasts. One came above Carn, and was only sighted when the ebb was taking it seaward again. It passed down very close to the ships on the mooring station. One of their watchmen it was who gave the alarm.

Fortunately the storm eased, and the search thereafter, soon proved successful. The field was swept. Another week in which no mines appeared and the seas were declared clear. Great was Davis's relief. He had feared for the safety of the ships on the mooring station, and there was no room for any of them ashore.

Yet another pocket of mines must still have existed, for the wind coming away stiff from the northward once more, brought the drifting menace to the estuary again; and within a few hours of the new Notice to Mariners being issued, proclaiming the safety of the seas, another steamer, one outward bound from Carn, was destroyed.

It was night, and blowing very hard at the time. The sound of the explosion was faint; so faint, that only a few in Carn heard it, and of these only one or two made any mention of the matter. Nor was much notice taken of what they said. Davis, for example, who was roused by the report as he was on the point of falling asleep, thought it merely the bang of a distant, wind-closed door. But their story was soon shown to be well-founded. Wreckage appeared up and down the estuary; bodies were cast ashore. Yet where the vessel had sunk was never known. The estuary had channels and holes more than a hundred fathom deep, and they kept their secret.

Kalmuk was her name. A Norwegian ship, a large, ocean-going tramp, she had been strike-stayed in Carn for several weeks, and her crew had become very popular with the townsfolk. Their end cast a gloom over the place. Hardly had it lifted when another and more terrible disaster happened, one in which the town was more directly concerned.

On the other side of the estuary, two miles nearer

the sea than was Carn, another shipbreaking company had their yard. Their biggest ship was a large battle-cruiser; her draught had been so great that they had not been able to beach her close in. She had stuck on a bank. There they had been stripping her.

In course of time, however, her weight had made the bank give under her; she lay in a channel—a fact which seemed to have escaped the notice of her breakers, for they led out no mooring cables to keep her in position; and the flood setting in one day with unwonted violence, swung her stern round, levered her forefoot off the bank, and carried her clear. So great was her weight and so swift ran the tide, before they could secure her and bring her up, she was well-nigh ashore at the head of the estuary many miles away.

In the slack of the tide she was towed back towards her resting place, a huge, bare hulk whose passing made thousands pause watching. Davis was in his office as she passed, busy as was his wont. He was roused by the sudden and complete stopping of the yard clangour. An instant later came the now horribly familiar roar of an explosion. With a yell he rushed out. All he saw was a cloud of smoke and a troubled sea in which tossed a solitary tugboat, bits of wreckage and swimming men.

All work had ceased in the yard. Everybody was running to the shore. Every boat was being manned or racing to the scene. Seated with Stewart in one of them, he heard what had happened. For so terrible a happening it was a brief enough story.

The explosion had taken place amidships. The cruiser had split in two. Being little else but a shell she had gone down at once; and before their hawsers could be cast off, two of her three tugboats had been dragged down with her. Nor when the survivors came to tell their tale was the account greatly amplified. One man only could add a fresh detail; he was the sole survivor of the dozen men who had been aboard the cruiser. He said that he had heard a thud and a grating noise near her

keel—then he had found himself in the water. Thirty men were missing, and twenty of them came from Carn.

5

Davis and Stewart were a long time in returning to the yard. Hour after hour the boats had remained on the estuary, some near the scene of the disaster, others drifting with the tide, their crews unwilling to give up the watch on the waters, even after all hope of rescuing other survivors had gone.

Nor did Davis go straight to the office when they did return. Stewart hurried off in that direction immediately he stepped ashore; but the undermanager lingered behind, and finally came to a stop, deep in thought, at the shoreward end of the pier. An enquiry, begun by him from little more than curiosity after the loss of the *Kalmuk*, but continued thereafter with growing interest, had revealed a point of similarity in the disasters. The point had been present in this the last. He was wracking his brains, and raking over his wide engineering knowledge, on the chance of finding something that would make it significant of their cause. . . . A profitless effort, however. At last making up his mind to lay the matter before his chief, he moved on.

Stewart was coming out of the office as he entered. The old man was muttering, and passed him without a look; and in his room, as though awaiting him, stood Big Jim. He wondered if there had been some disagreement between the pair, for when his chief spoke his tone was sharp.

"How soon will you have an empty berth, Davis?" he asked.

"A month at present progress, sir," the undermanager replied. "A week with extra hands."

"Get the extra hands on at once then, as many as

you can," Big Jim ordered. "I want a berth the very first tide you can give me it."

He turned abruptly towards the connecting door.

"Can you spare a moment, sir?" Davis called after him. "There is something I have found out about those blow-ups that I would like to tell you."

"Oh," said Big Jim, glancing round suspiciously. "Have you been talking to Stewart about it?"

"No, sir," replied the undermanager, a little surprised at the question and the tone of it. "It is nothing much—only that all the ships concerned have been in a highly magnetic condition."

"How do you make that out?" asked Big Jim, sitting down in the chair on the other side of the desk, interested, his suspiciousness gone.

"Because that freighter for one was loaded with ore, and would be magnetic enough to drive her skipper crazy," said Davis. "While the other four had been lying for months, practically on a magnetic meridian."

"That battle cruiser was," said Big Jim.

"So were the others. I enquired about them and went to see where they had been lying. Got the idea from the *Kalmuk*. She had been strike-stayed in Carn for nearly four months, as you know. That steamer which was blown up the morning we arrived, was strike-stayed also. The *Athene* had been lying in dock for six months under repair. Every one of them was on a magnetic line of force, and must have sucked up no end of magnetism from the earth. But that's all, sir. I can't tack the idea on to anything," he admitted. "Unless it is just that the more highly magnetic the ship the more liable it is to attract a floating mine?"

"Perhaps there is something in that," Big Jim said thoughtfully. "You know, Davis," he confessed, "when you started speaking, I thought you and Stewart had been putting your heads together, and that you had come to back him up. I had to tell him off pretty stiffly just now. He went a bit too far. He was worked

up, of course, by that ghastly affair with the cruiser, but he is not the only one. What do you think he is putting the explosions down to?"

"What, sir?"

"A ghoul."

"A ghoul?"

Big Jim nodded.

"What in all the world is that?"

"A kind of ghost that eats dead men," replied Big Jim, smiling a little at his undermanager's amazement.

"Surely he is not serious, sir?" said the undermanager incredulously.

"He is. But he does not mean exactly that. He uses the word in a special sense. Way back in my brother's time, a dirty old schooner used to mooch round the pearling fleets, getting paid to move on. No pay, no move on. Down would go her anchor, and before the week was out some boat was pretty sure to be in trouble—sunk, or burnt, or ashore. His name for her was *The Ghoul*. She brought bad luck. Fact, Davis. She did. He burnt her finally, and threatened to burn her old Jew owner if he got another. And would have done it, too! only the Israelite was wise. Now he has got the same idea about that cruiser we brought up together. He thinks she has brought bad luck to the estuary."

Big Jim paused and looked searchingly at his undermanager.

"He is positive about it," he continued. "That explosion . . . Gad! you don't think so, too, do you?"

Davis had grown very solemn.

"No . . . I don't," he replied slowly. "Only—You are bringing her in, aren't you, sir? That's what you want the berth for, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Oh well, that satisfies me. I was only reminded by Stewart's idea that I felt jolly queer about her the morning we arrived. I sat alone in her engine-room and got the shivers."

"You did?"

"Yes. She reminded me somehow of the *Eckler*. And though I did not associate the feeling with her at the time, I honestly felt that there was bad luck somewhere round about."

"Good Lord," Big Jim murmured, and Davis saw with some little surprise that he was very uneasy.

"It was only strain and fed-upness, sir," he hastened to explain. . . . "Jove, you don't think she has brought bad luck too, sir?"

Without replying, Big Jim got up and began to pace restlessly up and down the room.

"This has been a terrible blow to Carn," he said, suddenly pausing by the desk. "I went along while you were out. They all lived near each other. One street has been practically cleaned out of menfolk. It is full of crying women and children now. I could not stick it. I had to come back."

"Yes, it is a pretty bad business, sir," Davis said gravely, "especially brought as it is right on to one's own doorstep. All the same, I don't think you should let it influence you in regard to Stewart's idea."

"But it was your idea too, man?"

"My idea was not founded on very much, sir."

"How do you know?" demanded Big Jim. "Take it from me, Davis, ships speak at times, talk in their sleep and give themselves away. I have known men who could sit alone in them as you did. . . . But that aside! Stewart's ideas, though generally all wrong topsides, have a nasty trick of turning out with good solid bottoms to them; and candidly, I am worried about that cruiser now. She has been so darned near every one of those explosions."

"But what could she do, sir? Mines are mines, after all, and she could not have brought them!"

"No. I don't suppose for a moment she did. But why should they only explode near her? The mines are all over the coast, but it is only up here that explosions have taken place."

"Jove, that never occurred to me!" Davis exclaimed. "By Jove, it is a remarkable point."

"It is," said Big Jim. "It has been puzzling me for some time. I thought at first your magnetic ship idea was going to give a satisfactory explanation. But it didn't. Two thirds of the country's shipping has been strike-stayed, and a whole lot of ships must have become abnormally magnetic, yet not a single one has been blown up elsewhere. Don't imagine, however, that I think Stewart's idea explains things either. Possibly, if I had not been along to Carn just before——Look here, Davis!" he said, the memory of those stricken homes in the town making him come to a sudden decision. "I don't feel justified in letting her remain out there any longer. Order a crew aboard. We will bring her in to-night."

"Next tide, you mean, sir?" Davis suggested doubtfully.

"No. Just now. You had better be quick. The hooter will be sounding immediately."

"But where'll we put her, sir? And there's no water," remonstrated the undermanager.

"Get busy on that 'phone," said Big Jim so sharply, that Davis had darted out his hand and grabbed the telephone before he was conscious of willing the action.

6

The hooter had sounded and the yard was empty when they left the offices to search for a berth for the cruiser. Already her beaching crew had gone aboard. Stewart had hurried them. Smoke was coming from one of her funnels. But it seemed as though she would be ready long before her beaching place was found. The fore-shore was chock-a-block with old ships. The berthing by the piers was full. And the tide was out. A long stretch of beach was uncovered. In one place only was there water enough to bring a ship of the cruiser's draught

to a safe position ashore—along the winding channel of a small stream that entered the estuary on the seaward side of the piers.

The stream had once been a powerful tributary; high banked and broad at its outflow. With its shrinking, however, the beach had grown across its mouth, narrowing the entrance and forming a natural harbour, which was never dry. This harbour was known to the yard folk as the Basin. It was an excellent berth for a ship, but already filled. Yet thither, after a vain search of the foreshore, Big Jim led the way.

"It will have to be here," he said. "I think I can just get her bows into the mouth with present water, and we don't want her any further. She can lie there till we have a berth clear, and you can start dismantling her. A rope out on either bow and a kedge astern should hold her safely."

"Not if the wind comes away north west," said Davis. "A wind we seldom get. We will risk it."

Davis sighed. It was the position that he had feared would be chosen.

Within he had a battleship lying, most of whose breakage he was lightering seaward, and with the cruiser moored in the entrance, the lighters would be prevented from coming and going except near high water—a great interference with his scheme of work. But he made no protest. Big Jim, he saw, was determined to have the cruiser in, and there was no other berth for her. And what he saw on the way out to the roadstead took even the thought of grumbling from him. A boat passed close by bearing two drowned men home. He felt then that any precaution was justified, however fantastic and absurd Stewart's notion might be. In the growing darkness too, the big, foreign-like ram of the cruiser, and her fat, swollen underbody gave her a peculiarly malignant look: but he was still thinking of that passing boat whose rowers had rowed so silently.

Stewart was forward superintending the slipping of

the cables when they climbed aboard. He was working his men as though trying to anticipate a possible canceling of the order to unmoor. With the first beat of the screws, however, he came aft. Davis approached him curiously.

"Where did you get this idea of yours, Stewart?" he enquired.

"What idea?" asked the old man. "That she's a ghoul?" He shrugged his shoulders. "I am old enough wi' the sea to know when things should and shouldna' be," he said simply. "There will be no more explosions once she is ashore and broken."

Davis knew that he had been born in Stepney, sixty-eight years before—in Stepney, and in a storm off the Horn; and watching him walk away, an ancient mariner, gaunt and grim, kin to all sea things, bred by the ocean and given its lore, he felt his first faith in the old man's idea. In that faith Big Jim was bringing the cruiser ashore; yet in what he said, in a measure Stewart proved wrong. Not yet were the explosions at an end. Skilfully the vessel was coned up the winding channel, her bow thrust aground in the Basin's mouth. An instant later Davis and all aboard were overthrown by the tremendous air blast from an explosion not a hundred yards away.

Stunned and deafened, he rose to his feet and gazed stupidly around, unable to understand what had happened. Falling mud and water were pounding and splashing down. He was drenched and bombarded. As a whisper he heard his chief call; he staggered towards the sound, and found Big Jim in front of the wheelhouse, staring forward, pointing whither he stared. He sent his gaze in the same direction. Straight ahead was the battleship's forepart. Near the bow, true on their end-on line, her side was split open and torn, and through the rent was pouring the sea.

"What did that?" he shouted. "A mine could never come into the Basin against the stream."

"No," roared Big Jim. "But a torpedo could."

"A torpedo! . . . That was never a torpedo, sir?"

"It was."

"Surely not?"

"It was, I tell you. I saw its wake just before the burst. My God, Davis!" Big Jim clutched the stout bridge bulwark and shook and swayed it in his excitement. "We have struck the greatest mystery of the war—you and Stewart between you. Can't you see that battleship is on a magnetic meridian? She's another of your highly magnetic ships. It's not mines they attract. It's torpedoes!"

"But where from?"

"From us! That big ram is boss. It's stored with them—fitted to fire them as soon as a magnetic ship passes by. Can't you see what has been happening? We swung end-on to the *Athene* to avoid collision, and on to that freighter when making our turn. And the others passed her just after the full, when the ebb was swinging her round. She torpedoed them all. The mines only fogged us. It has been her, this——of a man-made ghoul, all the time."

"Oh, hell!" murmured Davis, and it was all he could say. He stood as stupefied by his chief's revelation as by the din and violence of the explosion.

"I don't know how," Big Jim continued, grown calmer and more thoughtful, "I can see how she kept supplied with power to handle her torpedoes. Concealed wires from her dynamos and accumulators would do it, or a gadget like a Forbes' Ship's Log, pushed through her skin and working in the tides. But the rest is beyond me. It's up to you to explain. Obviously it is some device susceptible to a magnetic pull—which means the earth's pull as well as a ship's, both reinforcing each other probably. It must be that. Look how the explosions have all taken place during the period of greatest strain, just when she was swinging round! Something is released then, and

the torpedo is fired. Wake up, man! You're the engineer. Can't you suggest anything?"

"A pivoted needle of phosphor bronze, a nob of iron at one end, held against the earth's attraction by an electro-magnet, just powerful enough to do it," ventured Davis. "The extra pull of a ship might swing the needle away and against two electric terminals, and so complete a circuit. Possibly her torpedoes are sensitive to a magnetic pull too, and that keeps them on to their target. But it's beyond me, sir. It's diabolic."

"Come ashore," said Big Jim.

MacArthur tried to stop them by the gangway. He and Stewart, while Davis still lay stunned, had rushed from the bridge to find out how the hands had fared. No one was injured, he was able to tell them; and Big Jim heard him so far. But he cut short his excited queries and speculation with an order to moor, and passed over-side. He had grown very grave. During the passage to the pier he did not speak.

"What are you going to do, sir?" Davis asked him as they stepped ashore.

"Do?—Man, don't you see what we have tumbled on?—what this means? It's tremendous. What ships became more abnormally magnetic during the war than warships, hung up as they were, and constantly in for repairs? She's not a ship handed over since Armistice. She was captured—captured undamaged! Gad, I could give it another name."

"And all those mysterious——!" Davis stopped aghast.

"Ay," said Big Jim grimly. "We'll find out from the Admiralty where she has been lying. Perhaps certain other mysterious blow-ups will be explained."

In silence they passed through the darkening yard and into the offices. In silence they were sitting half an hour later when Stewart and MacArthur came in; in silence the four of them sat together for a long time. . . . At the yard entrance, on their way home, Big Jim said as

though only then comprehending a question asked some time before: "Not by darkness, Davis. It's too risky. You will have plenty of time to have a look at her tomorrow before they send."

But that night the north-west wind blew; and it blew strong; and a high tide flowed.

Something of what happened Stewart was able to tell, for he was left behind to mind the cruiser's moorings. Before the allied powers of wind and tide one bow rope was giving; he was scrambling ashore with another when the cable astern parted in a sudden squall. Into the Basin the cruiser was borne, and on towards the battleship—he had then run away. And Carn was awakened that night by the roar of another explosion, the last, the greatest by far. It shook and swayed the whole town. It lifted the battleship entire, and flung her a shivered mass beyond high water. And the *Ghoul* passed in fragments to the estuary, her secret to the air.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DEATH SHIP

I

THE *Ghoul* was the last vessel to be brought to Carn of the lot bought by Big Jim against Finket, and the last to give trouble. The next ship to have a history apart from that told by the breaker's hammer and the figures of her piecemeal sale in record and ledger, was none of his buying; and she might have brought her trouble to any of the other shipbreaking firms who had yards on the estuary. The *Santiava* came to Carn solely because the Carn Company had a more energetic undermanager and more skilful and daring boatmen than had the other companies; and she came in a high wind.

The wind blew a night and a day; not once did it back or veer. A steady, unstayable force, it swept the estuary, bringing the flood tides in like mill races, damming the ebbs; breeding no sea, but sending the spindrift before it like driven snow. It uprooted cranes in the yard; it lifted huge plates of steel and carried them away as though they were of paper. Ships beached were bowled over on their beam ends. No work could be done. The passage from gatehouse to shore was as dangerous as a crossing of No Man's Land. But what worried Davis most was that it blew straight in from the sea—straight through other roadsteads before reaching his own; and ships were being carried away and driven up the estuary; and though his own moorings would hold, he knew . . . At dusk of the day what he feared came.

A large steamer, anchorless, only watchmen aboard,

bore down and athwart the first cable. In a couple of minutes the mooring-station was stripped. He saw his ships drift away and disappear in the darkness. Just then, the tide turned. Worse still, the wind fell. In a roaring flood the dammed-up waters poured out of the estuary, and the runaways went with them—seven ships. Eight were brought back after a night of peril and a search extending miles beyond the estuary—seven ships owned by the company, and one other. Thus the *Santiava* came to Carn, a foundling, salved in the darkness by weary men who mistook her for their own.

For half a day she lay undiscovered; fog had followed the wind, and the mooring-station was hidden from the shore. In the afternoon, however, the weather cleared. Davis, seated in his room discussing with MacArthur a coming salvage expedition, happened to look out of his window and saw her; and he swore.

"As if we hadn't enough to do last night," he growled. "Do you see we have brought in another firm's ship for them? . . . On No. 2 moorings? That three-funnelled light cruiser," he added, as MacArthur continued to stare out of the window without replying. "Jove, this firm would make a grand hard-labour colony. We had better get her identified at once and stopped wearing out our cables."

He made to push the bell to summon the clerk, but MacArthur interposed and stopped him.

"*Santiava* is her name, Davis," he said quietly. "And she does not belong to any of the other firms. Don't you know her?"

"No. Whose ship is she?"

"Nobody's. She's a derelict."

"A *derelict*?" exclaimed Davis in surprise. "By Jove!"

"Yes. Been drifting about over three years. Haven't you heard her name?"

"Never."

"That's a pity, for I suppose you are inclined to think

her a nice little picking for the firm. She's not. It's just our bally luck that she has come. We'll get no salvage on her. We'll be left with her, if we aren't careful. And I can tell you this, that if the chief were here just now his remarks would be burning up this room. You will do well to be quit of her before he comes back. It's the worst bit of work that you and I ever did to let her come on to our moorings."

"Why?"

"Because she is simply not safe," said MacArthur. "She's the *Death Ship* to all that know her. You don't, so that means next to nothing to you. But in little over a year she killed every man of six different crews—they vanished, and to this day no one knows how they went."

"Let's have the yarn," said the undermanager.

"Right. But it is queer," the captain warned him. "In fact, if I had not struck a bit of it first hand, and if I did not know that Stewart could confirm a good deal of the rest from first hand also, I would hesitate about telling it. Take a look at her first. . . . What tonnage do you place her at?"

"Just over four thousand," answered Davis readily.

"She's barely two thousand."

"Rubbish."

"Fact. She is built of a special steel nearly twice as strong, weight for weight, as any other steel known. An American millionaire inventor——"

"John P. Maynard?" interrupted Davis.

"That's the name. Heard of him?"

"Oh yes.—Heard of his steel. But I thought he died with his secret before any quantity of the stuff could be made. Didn't the Germans get the name of putting him away?"

"They did, and there was certainly some mystery about his death, though I don't suppose they were responsible for it any more than you or I. Anyhow, he had built the *Santiava*; built her in secret and got her ready before his country declared war. Over she came. She was

simply a wonder! Speed away up over fifty knots. Nothing to touch her. Then three months after she came over she disappeared."

"Bit of a sensation it caused, as you can guess," continued MacArthur. "But nothing to the sensation caused by her reappearance. It was thought she had struck a mine, or been caught napping and torpedoed. She hadn't. She turned up in the North Atlantic and sank three mail boats one after the other—and she still flying the American flag!

"That was the strange thing. What had happened, God only knows. Her crew might have mutinied, though I've always fancied the Germans had got her somehow. But there you are! She disappeared again. And just about a month later, one of our cruisers found her away down south of the Falklands, deserted—not a man aboard, yet not a boat missing. Mysterious, wasn't it?"

"Darned queer about the boats," said Davis. "Wasn't there even one missing?"

"Not even one," answered the captain. "I was on that cruiser, and I saw them all.

"Lucky for me I was left on her," he continued. "We sent off a crew and I nearly went in command, so the old man told me afterwards. Lucky for me I didn't—darned lucky. We lost sight of her an hour later, the night coming on, and she'd gone—disappeared again."

"We were homeward bound, and we came through hellish weather; and it was thought she had foundered. We were near doing so more than once ourselves. Had she! Somehow and somewhere the Germans had got her. Sure, this time. For she turned up near the Faroes flying their flag, and—can you believe it!—deserted and not a boat missing again. . . . Can you stand any more?"

"Jove, she didn't go again, surely?"

"She did. And the Germans recovered her evidently, only to lose her, same way as before. She was found deserted, flying their flag. Stewart got aboard her this

time, off the chief's boat. But he didn't stay. Trust old Stewart! She was driving north then, and they let her drive.

"There the gospel stops; the rest is second, third, perhaps fourth and fifth hand," the captain admitted frankly. "But I heard of her several times afterwards, chiefly through Stewart; and each time she was sighted, she was flying a different flag. Once she was reported with a derelict trawler alongside. Which might all be true, and might not. It certainly would take a lot to convince seamen that they could not sail to port an apparently sound ship like the *Santiava*, and it is more than likely that she was boarded again, and just as likely that she did away with her new hands as she did away with her old. Last I heard she was iced. That was true, I fancy. She has been hiding somewhere for more than two years, and the ice would be the place to hide her. Now she is here. What are you going to do?"

"I don't quite know," said Davis doubtfully. "It's a pretty stiff yarn, MacArthur. Talk about the *Marie Celeste*! By Jove."

"Darned stiff. So stiff that seamen hardly like to tell each other," MacArthur admitted.

"Yet I can't understand why it has not got about. I have never heard a whisper of it before."

"Can't you? I'm surprised at that. You know as well as I do that the strangest stories of the sea are the truest, and that they seldom if ever get into print. A seaman doesn't mind being laughed at for spinning a yarn that he knows to be a yarn, but he takes mighty good care that he is not laughed at for telling what he knows to be true. You are surely not thinking of staking out any claim on her, Davis? Put that out of your mind if you are. Either slip her out to sea to-night and leave her there, or let me go up to town to her navy people and insist on them taking her off our hands. They mayn't do it. If not, out she must go to sea. We simply can't keep her. What's it to be?"

"I'll tell you when I have been over her," said Davis, rising.

"Right. I'll come with you," said MacArthur, getting up also. "I only hope we get off again. We had better take Stewart as well. He knows her. No, don't trouble to send for him. You'll see he won't be very far away."

And MacArthur was right. As though expecting them, Stewart was standing on the landing-stage. Without a word, he untied the launch's painter and followed them aboard. They sailed for the roadstead, the three of them alone. MacArthur steered. He brought up on the cruiser's blind side, and they stood off for a little while, surveying her.

Silent she lay, a ship strange without her story. She had been in the ice—that was plain; in the heart of it—on one of her turrets was a large glacier stone. Her rail was flattened. Several of her guns were broken or pushed askew. Scarce an upright stanchion remained. She was worn and bare. Yet only her superstructure was damaged. Her hull and main parts were sound as when made.

"It's great stuff she is built of," said Davis. "There's not a speck of paint below her water-line either, yet not a trace of fouling. Do you notice?"

"Do you notice her boats?" said MacArthur significantly.

"I noticed them right away," Davis said, and fell silent; by the boats her tale was confirmed.

They had suffered with the rest of the top-hamper. The ice had speared their planking, forced in their sides, and displaced them. But not one was gone, and no effort had been made to swing one out; the davits still turned inward, the falls were up short. However her last crew had left her, they had passed over-side some other way. And to Davis came a vision of them, but not of their going—of their coming, as they sat in their boats and looked up at her, ere they climbed aboard to disappear; and he shivered slightly as he took hold of the side ladder. The rungs were cold—cold as dead hands.

"She's creepy," he said to MacArthur, who followed him up to the gangway.

"Thought you would think so," the captain grunted. "We'll wait for Stewart, if you don't mind," he added, and Davis did not demur.

The mate had stayed behind to make safe the engine for the period of their absence. But presently he climbed up.

"Come on," he said, at once starting off. "Now we are on, the sooner we are off again the better."

Without hesitation he led them below. He knew his way. He must have searched her very thoroughly on his previous visit, for he was never at a loss though the ship almost throughout was in darkness. Close behind him they followed, peering nervously past his shoulders into the zone of his flashlight ray; and in wonder Davis began to think of the courage of this old man, who had come that way before, alone, and on the high seas.

A great awe of the ship had fallen on him. Some magic of her steel had kept her in perfect repair. Not a rivet was loosened; not a frame or plate had lost true. He could have started her engines within an hour; they were undamaged, ready for power, just as her last engineer had left them. But also he felt as an intruder might in a silent house, new shuttered and closed on occupants dead of some plague. Life had ceased very suddenly aboard. In an instant of the daily round her crew had been spirited away. Everywhere was evidence of their presence. Yet they were not there.

He saw jackets and coats hanging on pegs in the berths, and bed-clothes in some of the bunks, pushed aside as by men rising from rest or slumber. Nothing was missing. The sole disorder was the disorder of use. In one of the alleyways Stewart stumbled over a mop and bucket, set there by a steward who had left his work for a moment—and had not returned. Even the rats had gone. In one of the mess-rooms a table was laid for a meal, and the remains of food were on the plates.

"The rats were never aboard," said Stewart abruptly, though neither of the others had spoken. "They ken where it's no' safe to be."

"Let's get out of this," muttered MacArthur. "Don't you think we should go, Stewart?"

Davis felt the challenge of Stewart's glance.

"There's just one thing I've noticed about her," he said. "Half a minute, MacArthur. Bring your light nearer this partition, Stewart."

The partition had been painted white, but now it was speckled thickly with black spots, so curiously arranged and variant in size, that they might have been blobs of paint, flicked by a careless painter from an overloaded brush.

"That is all over the ship," he said. "I have an idea that it would explain a lot if we knew what it was. Can you make anything of it? Seems to me a kind of mildew."

"Dam' funny mildew," grunted Stewart.

"Was it here when you came aboard?" enquired the undermanager.

"Ay. Some of it," said the old man slowly. "But some of it was wet and red."

"My God! It's never blood!" exclaimed Davis, backing hastily away from the partition.

"It was," said Stewart. "And the freshest spots had been made no' many hours before I saw them. She was bloodstained a' over. An awfu' sight."

"You never told me that," muttered MacArthur.

"Some things are best no' spoken o'," the mate replied.

"And there was nothing aboard?" whispered Davis.

"Nothing, though I searched her high and low. They'd a' gone. . . . Have you seen enough?"

"We'll quit," said Davis. . . . On the pierhead he said to MacArthur: "You can still catch the night mail to town. Tell them if they don't take her off our hands we sink her."

He remained behind with Stewart for a little while longer, and both of them gazed at the *Santiava*.

"Have you any idea of what could have happened?" he enquired at length.

"Have I seen the bottom o' the sea?" asked the old man; and he walked away.

2

MacArthur returned from town two days later, very pessimistic about the result of his interview.

"They have got to wait instructions from the other side," he told Davis. "They know her," he added significantly.

"And meanwhile they expect us to keep her here, I suppose?"

"That's about the size of it. I told you we would not get rid of her so easily. What if she is here when Stewart and I go off? You will be left to see this through yourself."

"That salvage trip of yours is cancelled, so you needn't worry," Davis replied. "End of next month you, Stewart and myself are bound for Mexico to lift something there. Heard from the chief yesterday—no address, as usual. I hope to goodness we are clear of her before then."

"So do I. He won't half have something to say as it is. They promised to cable. Very decent they were, though dead wise! If you don't hear by next week, I'd enquire if I were you."

Davis enquired. But no word had come; and the week became a fortnight, and still another week passed, and still the *Santiava* lay on No. 2 moorings, her fate undecided.

No one from the yard went near her. She lay unwatched, unlit by night; but fortunately her story was not known abroad; and among the hands, and in the town, she was regarded as an ordinary company purchase. Davis, too, felt his awe of her grow less with the passing of time. No longer did his glance wander nervously to the

roadstead as he entered the yard each morning; he scarcely ever mentioned her to MacArthur or Stewart. Yet he did not cease to press for her removal; and towards the end of the fourth week a discovery was made that determined him to force a decision.

Stewart made it. He came for the undermanager and took him aboard, and led him to where one of the cruiser's damaged boats had lain. It had been removed. On the chocks in its place was a boat from Carn—a boat that had been stolen about a month before.

But who had stolen it, and who had been living on the *Santiava* all that while, no one knew. Two homeless men they were, probably, who had taken advantage of her lack of watchmen to come aboard for what they could find. Down in the captain's pantry they had made themselves beds, and lain there feasting and revelling amid the stores. The floor was littered with empty bottles and tins when Davis entered. The air was warm. Another stove still burned. They had been gone from the place only a few hours . . . and on the ceiling and sides were fresh blood stains.

"They are no' here now, though the boat's here," Stewart said grimly.

"Are you sure, Stewart? Have you searched?" Davis whispered.

"Ay."

Davis broke from the place, and ran on deck.

Stewart followed, walking.

"What can have happened?" Davis asked him when he appeared. "It's simply too awful."

"She's eaten them," grunted the old man, "same as the others. Come on ashore."

That night the undermanager went to town on the same mission MacArthur had gone the month before. Both MacArthur and Stewart came to the station to meet him on his return. He brought definite and favourable news. The *Santiava* was to go, first for overhaul to a port thirty miles down the coast, then home.

"They don't want to take her," he told them in conclusion, "and I don't blame them. It's the inventor's relatives who have forced their shorefolk's hands. But she was going in any case—even if it meant raising another wind."

A day or two later a surveyor came, went over the vessel with Stewart, and departed. He must have reported favourably on her condition, for within a week a crew was aboard. Three days they stayed on her in sight of Carn, preparing her for sea, and nothing untoward happened. Then the destroyer arrived that was to escort her. On a fine sunny morning the two ships sailed. And from roadstead to skyline, Davis, standing with Stewart and MacArthur on the pierhead, watched them go.

"I reckon I can work now," he said with a sigh of relief as he saw the hulls beginning to disappear. "She will surely do thirty miles safely."

"She's away, anyhow," remarked the captain.

Stewart said nothing. His gaze never left the vanishing ships. He remained behind watching, and MacArthur stayed with him, when the undermanager turned away to seek his office-chair; and it was a memory of the earnestness of the old man's gaze, not any premonition of evil, that made Davis back a pace or two from the shore-end of the pier and look through a gap between two old ships for a last glimpse of the cruiser and her escort ere they passed for ever from his view. He saw the *Santiava* steaming on alone. The destroyer had disappeared. At the same moment he heard MacArthur yell.

Astounded, he stood staring, expecting every moment, in spite of the cry of dismay, to see the destroyer draw clear of her companion's blanketing form. But she did not appear. MacArthur yelled again—a summons; the mate's voice sounded also, snapping out order after order. Guessing what they meant to do, he raced to join them.

On the outer side of the pier, in the deep water where no hulk could be berthed, the *Seabird*, one of the three

smart salvage steamers of the Company always lay, her boilers never without some pressure of steam, lest a hasty call for her services might come for some ship broken away from the roadstead or the yard: but for this precaution, the seven runaways would never have been brought back so quickly on the night that the great wind fell. Now her funnel was already belching out the thick black stoking smoke. Skipper and mate had gone aboard. Her ropes were cast off forward; her bow was veering away from the pier.

"Let go astern," shouted MacArthur as the under-manager skipped nimbly over her traffrail. "My God, Davis!" he exclaimed, as Davis joined him on the bridge. "She swerved and cut the destroyer clean in two."

"They collided?"

"Yes. . . Don't you understand, man? Look! *She's steaming on.*"

"Good Lord," muttered the undermanager.

Hull down on the horizon, the faint apparition of a ship, the *Santiava* was holding seaward, while behind her the destroyer's crew drowned.

3

Swiftly they covered the eight or nine miles to the scene of the collision. They slowed and searched, and found no one. The destroyer had been a snug ship. She had dragged down her boats and left no wreckage to which a man might cling. And out on the open sea, still hull down on the horizon, the ship which had done the evil was still steaming on. Davis nodded as MacArthur looked to him for orders. The pursuit began.

Built for the roughest work of the high seas, and for the outdistancing of all rivals in a race for a prize, the *Seabird* had been filled with power by Big Jim. Steadily she pulled her chase over the horizon. An hour and they saw beyond doubt what kind of ship they pursued.

Gravely Stewart handed the glass to MacArthur. The captain sighted through it for an instant; in silence he passed it on. Davis looked round at them after a long survey.

"She has done it again," he said solemnly.

"Better let her go," said MacArthur, breaking the pause. "Don't you think so, Stewart?"

The mate shrugged his shoulders.

"We'll go on," said Davis, and he went below to call for more power. On his way back from the engine-room he entered the saloon and from the log locker took a loaded revolver.

The *Santiava* was barely a mile away when he returned to the bridge and the gap was fast lessening, so speedy had the response been to his call; and so clear was the weather, what the glass had revealed was now plain to the unaided eye. She was an unmanned ship. Her decks were empty; no officer of the watch walked her bridge. In some mysterious, awful way she had rid herself of her crew. Out of human control, or perhaps from a dead helmsman falling against her wheel, she had swerved and run her escort down.

"Go alongside as close as you can, MacArthur," Davis said quietly as the *Seabird* stole up on her quarter and began to draw abreast. "I am going to board her."

It was the logical outcome of the pursuit, yet the captain seemed not to comprehend his meaning. As the undermanager slung a leg over the rail, however, and sat astride waiting, he understood.

"Don't be a blurry fool, Davis!" he exclaimed. "Good heavens, man——!"

"She has got to be stopped," Davis interrupted curtly. "We can't let her drive on like this. She is oil-fired and self-fed, and it will be to-morrow morning possibly before she slows up herself. Get her in, and less talk about it."

He swung his other leg over the rail. In a couple of minutes the leap had been taken. In spite of his dis-

ability, he lighted safely on the cruiser's deck ; and behind him MacArthur, his own hands on the spokes, sheered the *Seabird* off as skilfully as he had brought her alongside.

"Get on wi' it as quick as ye can," old Stewart shouted to him, and Davis went straight below. Not merely in obedience to the bidding, however. For his own sake he wanted to complete his mission as quickly as possible. He was afraid.

The decks had been cleared and cleaned since last he had stepped on them. No longer was she in darkness, no longer suggestive of a house shuttered and closed. She was a ship in use, a ship underway, vibrating through and through from the drive of her pistons, the beat of her screws. But just because of these things the fact of her lifelessness was the more conspicuous and significant, the more terrifying. Not in his whole descent, neither in the compartments through which he passed, nor in the alleyways along which he peered, did he see a man, living or dead.

Again her crew had been spirited away.

And the fresh white paint which had been spread over the marking, the black spots and splashes made a long time ago, did but make the more obvious other spots and splashes, not black, not old. . . . He put the revolver back in his pocket. Great though his fear was, he recognised the uselessness of the weapon. It could but provoke—provoke the fearsome thing which had slain on this ship so swiftly, so thoroughly ; slain and devoured so that nothing of its victims remained.

In the engine-room he realised that it did devour.

A man lay there, his face clawed and torn, his hands partly eaten away. . . .

Every separate noise of a thousand the engine-room made sounded clear to Davis in the instant of that discovery. Amongst them his soul, freed from his flesh in that instant by the shock of a tremendous horror and fear, listened for another, the sound of the Beast, the sign of the ogre spirit of this ship that lived on the bodies of

its crews. Somewhere it was lurking. It had stolen away as he entered. Presently it would reappear. In the mangled form so near to the throttle levers he saw his fate. That man was not an engineer. An officer—officer of the watch, perhaps, when the terror came—he had rushed below on the same mission as himself, and had been slain as he himself would be slain when he dared to move forward. For he felt the Beast waiting. With the cunning and courage bred of great fear he leaped suddenly forward, grasped the levers, turned them, stopped the engines. Then the Beast struck.

Teeth fastened into his left hand, wild fingers tore his right cheek—*his own* teeth, *his own* fingers.

Madness had come to him.

In his own person the secret of the Death Ship was revealed.

He screamed and flung his hands from him. His blood sprayed over the face of an indicator ; he saw the curious marking made. He screamed again. Again he bit and tore, impelled by the awful burning itch that suddenly had spread over his face, his neck and his hands—over every part of his body exposed to the air. He was in torment, torment increasing. As a summons from heaven to one in hell sounded the murmur and swish of the water against the ship's side. He rushed on deck, leaped overboard, and with frenzied strokes strove to prolong his dive deeper and deeper into the cooling depths of the sea.

4

Consciousness returned faintly to Davis to the sound of Big Jim's voice, hushed, but speaking in fierce rebuke of someone. He was lying on his face. Strong hands were compressing and recompressing the small of his back, and under their steady, alternating pressure he tried to breathe deeply, only to pass into unconsciousness again from the pain of his water-bound lungs. A second

time consciousness returned. He was lying in a bunk in a swelter of heat, but comfortable ; and he seemed to have dreamed that the *Ghoul* had just destroyed one of her victims ; under the suggestion of dreaming he turned over and slept. When he awoke, Big Jim was bending over him. Further away he saw MacArthur and Stewart.

Big Jim looked both anxious and angry. Like a huge fan his beard was spread over his breast and shoulders ; he still tugged and twisted it. Stewart looked anxious, MacArthur both anxious and subdued.

"What's the trouble ?" Davis enquired faintly.

"Don't you worry, old man," Big Jim replied. "Just lie quiet. Sleep if you can. Gad ! I'm glad to see you come to. I thought you were going to slip us."

"But when did you get back, sir ?" Davis persisted, his memory beginning to revive.

"Got back just after you sailed in the *Seabird*," Big Jim told him. "Came after you as quick as I could in one of the other boats. I was only a mile away when you boarded that darned cruiser. . . . Signals of course, were never made for the like of them !" He looked angrily at skipper and mate. "Came up as they fished you out."

"Him," grunted Stewart, pointing to MacArthur.

"Oh lord," muttered Davis, suddenly remembering everything, and he shuddered.

He looked at his bandaged hands, and felt his bandaged face, and shuddered again. Slowly he told them his tale. They listened in awe.

"Poison gas," Big Jim said briefly when he had finished. "She is sodden with it. Gives it out under the action of heat, the heat of her furnaces, and everybody aboard goes as you did. Gad ! What a terrible story. The poor devils would be glad to drown."

"They would," said Davis. "It was terrible. What's the cause of the gas, sir ? Is it from the action of the sea on her steel ?"

"Yes. All steels set up electrolysis in sea-water.

Maynard's stuff was specially active that way. And it occluded the gas it made, too. Seems also, by what you say, to have catalysed the gas into something particularly deadly. Soon as she was heated up or set vibrating by her engines, out would begin to come the poison. From the moment she was launched the *Santiava* has been nothing but a floating poison-gas factory, and the longer she remained afloat, the worse she became. There's no paint on her under-water. Her whole hull is active. Gad! Even the heat of that oil-stove brought out enough to shift those two shore rats after a time."

"Then we were lucky, too?" ventured MacArthur.

"You went aboard a cold ship, and you did not stay long enough to be affected," answered Big Jim. "But what a blurry fool you were, MacArthur, to let her remain."

"It was my fault, sir," Davis intervened loyally. "He wanted me to slip her out to sea. Besides, I've come to no harm, thanks to him. I'll be ready for that Mexico——"

"Will you! We'll see about that," said Big Jim, interrupting brusquely. "But that's neither here nor there. It has been a lucky ending for us to a very nasty affair, but the end should have been put within twenty-four hours of that cruiser's appearance. You knew her, MacArthur. You too, Stewart. Davis didn't. You should never have consulted him. Out she should have gone."

"By the way, sir!" exclaimed Davis, suddenly remembering his dream of the *Ghoul*, and glad to have an excuse to intervene again. "You haven't blown her up, have you?"

"I have. I wish I had had the chance sooner."

"But won't that lead to trouble with Maynard's relatives?" Davis enquired anxiously. "They hoicked their Government into bringing her over?"

"They will have to hoick more than their Government to get her now," growled Big Jim. "She was our ship."

In any case, I think it was only a matter of sentiment with them, and now that the mystery of Maynard's death is solved, they will be more than pleased that she is away. He was her first victim, Davis. That is what made me so positive about the cause of her trouble. His notes showed him to have been in the midst of a series of experiments on the electrolysing and occluding power of his steel when he died. They found him in a locked laboratory, key on the inside, lying on his back like—— ”

He stopped as Davis shuddered.

“ Like that—— ? ”

“ Ay,” said Big Jim. “ But just you forget about that.”

CHAPTER IX

SATAN FERREIRA

I

Two days' rest in his home and Davis felt himself well enough to return to the office. A fortnight later, with MacArthur and Stewart, he sailed for the Gulf of Mexico. He had only himself to blame for going so quickly ; Big Jim had wished to delay the start of the expedition for another month at least. The undermanager had insisted, however, on departing on the date already fixed, partly out of loyalty to his chief, who, he saw, was eager for him to set out as soon as possible ; partly from his own eagerness, for it was plain to him from the beginning that no ordinary salvage was being attempted.

The whole Carn salvage outfit had been put under his charge, and enough spare parts had been added to the stores, and skilled artificers to the personnel, to have enabled him to build a ship, far less salve one ; and though he had asked no questions, and nothing his chief had said justified him in thinking as he did, he sailed with the idea fixed in his mind that he was bound to bring home a sunken treasure-ship, or at least some very big prize. Seven months later he returned, a grievously disappointed and angry man. With him he brought, in tow behind the *Seabird*, a rusty three thousand ton yacht, once smart and graceful, now disreputable ; picked bare moreover by successive gangs of sea thieves ; hardly likely to be a treasure ship, certainly not a prize of any other kind.

On a reef off a Mexican island he had found her, sitting trim, high and dry, as though left by the tide. A wave it was, however, that had flung her there, crashed her on her beam ends first, ere drawing her upright with its back-suck ; and from wing plate to lower deck-beam ends, and to an extent of half her length over her midships, her starboard side was holed and crumpled in ; most of the frames were broken or seriously bent. Yet the most serious damage had come from the starboard engine. It had jumped its seatings in the crash, and forced the deep-floor plates and side longitudinals beneath it clean through her skin.

"She'll no' break her back till we try to shift her," Stewart had said dryly as he stood on the reef with Davis and MacArthur, surveying the ruin.

"He knew what he was doing when he sent you, Davis," was the captain's remark. "You will never be able to keep her afloat, even if you manage to float her."

Yet Davis had done both, achieving the seemingly impossible. Gradually from bow to stern he had cut the rock away under the vessel, and as he cut, built a supporting cradle which held her so that she could be repaired ; which then he had jacked down into a slipway, and thus slid her into the sea—easily the finest engineering feat of his career, and the bravest : he had done the jacking down alone, working beneath the huge mass for eighteen continuous hours, once he had started not daring to pause for a minute until he had lowered the great timber baulks to the beds which had been cut for them. The salvagers had cheered and cheered him when he crawled out, his delicate and dangerous job accomplished, and cheered and cheered him again when the yacht glided down, took the water and floated, almost on an even keel. Yet neither pleasure nor satisfaction had he drawn from his achievement. It had not been worth while ; it had been an outrage of engineering skill. The vessel's breaking profit could not possibly be more than a fifth of what she had cost to salve.

Nor had he been long in suspecting that his chief had played him his old irritating game ; she was a strange ship, one built for stealthy naval war.

Her armament was far heavier than that of any light cruiser ; and her guns were concealed—mounted in barbettes which could be lowered flush with the deck and covered with planking. In the course of his repairs also, he had come on double bulkheads and secret compartments where ammunition, men, anything contraband could have been concealed against a search at sea. *Alabama* was her name—a shrewd choice, he guessed. Obviously she had been a raider, perhaps a privateer. From something in her past, not from her intrinsic value, Big Jim's motive for salving her must have sprung. It angered him to think that his chief should have let him depart on such an immense undertaking, without taking him into his confidence in the slightest degree.

So he came home both disappointed and aggrieved. Big Jim's eyes twinkled a little at the sight of him.

"Gad, Davis," was his greeting, "you have a face like that old off-and-on Swede who sailed four times round the Man in a mist before he knew what he was doing. Glad to see you back. Have you had fever ? You're not looking too well."

"What did you want this old grid brought home for ?" Davis asked bluntly.

The twinkle left Big Jim's eyes.

"I'll tell you that later," he said gravely. "I am running her straight in. Come to the office afterwards. Where is Stewart ?"

Immediately he was told the mate's whereabouts he hurried away. Davis felt still more aggrieved. But the new and the old disgruntlement left him the moment he opened the connecting door to enter his chief's room, the beaching done. Stewart sat there with Big Jim. So quiet they had been sitting, Davis had thought Big Jim alone. So grim they seemed, he sensed at once some tragedy of the past had been resurrected for them ; and

though he sensed also that what had not been entrusted to him had been entrusted to Stewart, that from the beginning the latter had known the object of the *Alabama's* salving, while he, on whom success most depended, had been kept in ignorance, with that perception came the further perception that in the sterner life those two had led together he had had no part and could therefore claim no share in its deeper secrets. He felt glad that he had been able to serve his chief so well, for to Big Jim the bringing home of the vessel had evidently meant much.

"Come in, Davis," Big Jim called, as he stood hesitating in the doorway. "I was just going to send for you."

"I'll away then," said Stewart, rising.

Big Jim nodded. As the door closed behind the mate he said to Davis: "Stewart has been telling me how you got the *Alabama* refloated. Man, I'm thinking you are wasted in this company. You are the only man I know who could have done the job, and I can tell you I feel very greatly obliged to you. I thought her pretty hopeless when I saw her, but I guessed you could do it, so I sent you out. . . . Have a smoke."

He pushed a box of cigars towards his undermanager. He had already lit one himself; lit it as Davis entered, and quickly, as though to break by the action the grimness of his aspect. Never before, not even when he stood staring through from his room at Otto Guilter, had he seemed to Davis more disturbed, more under the influence of some bitter memory. Yet Davis too was glad to light up quickly. The praise had embarrassed him. All praise did. But never had Big Jim spoken so warmly. The inner reserve so characteristic of him was broken down.

"You are wondering a bit why I brought the *Alabama* here," he continued abruptly. "I'm not surprised. I doubt if anything I can tell you can stop you wondering—she came here because Stewart and I could think of nothing else; which puts you more in the dark than ever, I'm afraid, unless you understand that for a good half

of a lifetime, Stewart and I have been following a trail that ends in that ship. A pretty blind ending, you might say, with the sea all around and its million ways where never a footprint can show. So it is. But when you spend half a lifetime searching all along one trail and never finding, you get to turning over pebbles in time. That's what Stewart and I are doing. I don't mind admitting. . . . But I had better get on. It's a long yarn. You remember me saying there were two men I wanted to kill with my own hand. Guilter was one—he was nothing. The other—we were searching for him. His name was Dan Fereira."

Big Jim spat, and drew hard at his cigar. It had gone out. He lit it.

"A good seaman he was," he said, through the smoke of the first intake. "The best I've known, bar two. A he-witch with a ship, which is saying something. His mother was Finn, his father half-caste Hawaiian, which is saying something again. But the snake must have slept in his cradle. He was all bad, a clever, cunning, smiling, dangerous devil, who stabbed his mother because she saved her niece from him, and burned his father's schooner because he put the police on his track. He was fifteen at the time. By the time he was twenty, he was known as Satan Fereira, the most polished villain on the seas. He had very great charm. Ay! the good was there, but all at the service of the bad."

"Missionaries, for example, fell for him every time. A native pastor preached damnation against us when it was known our gang had put the red star on his name. He was plausible. They were all trying to save his soul, and he led them on. It amused him, and they were useful at times.

"I'll say this for him too—he was no coward. Back-o-saloon fights are nothing to go by, for the man who knows he has the surest gun packed on to him and the quickest knife—Well, he doesn't need to worry much about his chance of having hell-fire licking up his whiskers when he gets the straight word that someone else claims first call

on the bar. On that account I won't say anything about the number of mistakes he corrected, though they weren't a few. But he laid alongside a Russian gunboat once, when he could easily have got clear, it being night ; and though it was something like nine against ninety, that gunboat never signalled its station again.

"And if he took in hand to run a cargo of contraband he would run it. The only thing to stop him was a higher price from the other side. That was Satan—Satan Ferreira, a slick, handsome, flash son of a sea-ape, who talked big and did big, and sold his mates as he pleased. Otto Guilter!—Gad! Otto would have drunk his ullage had he told him to, or got a woman to knife him in the dark—if he could have found her.

"If he could have found her," Big Jim repeated. "And he would have found it difficult. Satan did what he liked with women, and never a hard word had they for him. They saved him many a time. It was a woman that brought him athwart us,—and saved him from us : Cleo de Mætzu, a planter's daughter, Spanish, aristocrat, but with just enough from a century-old slave ancestress to put the bloom of heaven on a summer twilight on her skin and make her the loveliest girl man ever saw. She married one of our gang. Johnny Matheson. Ever hear of Johnny ?

"No, you mightn't," he continued, as the under-manager shook his head. "He was a bit before your time. But I can remember when Ferreira's name was never mentioned without Johnny's cropping up as well. They were in the same line—contraband, pearls, anything ; but Johnny was the better seaman, and far and away the better man.

"Reckoned handier with a gun, too, though he never looked for trouble as Satan did. He could back out of a show without losing any. He was square. Men liked him. We liked him more. A merry lad. Any amount of brains and go. Made money easy, and didn't spend it like Satan. He had ideals and lived up to them—

aspirations as well. Folks round here would think him crazy if they knew what he planned to do. But round here isn't the world, praise be, and in the broader spaces, where bank-books don't count much against intelligence and grit, and young men's hands don't get fankled by old men's beards, Johnny would have had his way. But he married Cleo de Mætz, and that was the end of him.

"Some men should never marry, Davis—that's what it amounts to with some," said Big Jim sombrely. "Seamen never should unless among their kind. Bred by the sea, breed by it—you've seen that work out, I reckon; that is, among real sailormen. And Cleo was town reared and wanted her husband ashore. And Johnny wanted both Cleo and the sea. Between the two the heart was pulled out of him.

"Mind you, there's this to be said on her side—he had made money, and was young enough, and had brains enough, to turn to anything ashore. But there's this to be said on his—when a woman expects her husband to alter his whole life, to throw up his old friends and old ways, and to sail along a new course dictated by her, she ought to give him some hint beforehand. Cleo had given him none. And he'd gone and mistaken her pride in him for pride in his calling; and he thought she wanted nothing better than to make her home afloat with him. She hated the sea. There was trouble between them from the beginning. They were both so young. He was one of the kind who should never have married. There were his ideals, his aspirations. She didn't fit in with them,—and he would not let them go.

"What should ideals and aspirations be to a man, you might say, compared to the happiness of the woman he has married? Not much, most folks think. Not much compared to anything. Maybe they are right from their own point of view. Maybe. But women are cheap, and men are cheap, cheap as dirt, cheaper than dirt, apart from their ideals. Johnny guessed as much. He was a man, and yielding to Cleo meant letting his manhood

go. He stood her sapping for a bit, let her make his life a hell and said nothing. Then he laid down the law, and Cleo turned cold.

"You have got to understand, Davis, that just at this time the biggest scheme we ever touched was due. It was one of Johnny's aspirations, and it will show you the kind of man he was. We were going to bundle out a certain European Power from certain districts where their nationals had been behaving like pigs for years. I reckon you know who, and where. And we could have done it.

"They are not so bad now. We gave them a fright. But we could have done more, only a handful of whites though we were. With the natives behind us—and we had them, we could have cleared out both settlers and garrisons as we pleased, and made it not worth the while of the strongest Power to land any more. But on Johnny depended the natives. His power with them was wonderful. He was going to be their king. He would have been an emperor in time. It was only the start of a great, big scheme. A grand scheme. Johnny simply could not let us down. Cleo happy or no. He did. We had landed and were waiting for the rains to cut the settlements off from each other. Before the rains came, news arrived that took Johnny away, and the whole scheme was burst. Cleo had gone off with Satan Ferreira. God damn them!—there were people to say it served him right for leaving a bonny young wife alone. . . . Your smoke's dead. Have another."

He pushed the box over to Davis, drew it back and helped himself. They lit and smoked for about a minute in silence.

"Maybe it did," Big Jim continued. "Maybe it did. That wasn't Satan's way of thinking. He had done it on purpose to hit at Johnny. Johnny had been shoving him further and further north every year.

"I've told you already their names were always cropping up together. Well, it had come to this, men

wanted to see Satan get his measure taken by this time, and they were always mentioning Johnny now as the man who would do it.

"You see, they were about the same age, and reckoned the brightest pair of youngsters afloat; they were bound to be watched and compared; and it was getting plainer who was the better man.

"Satan knew it,—had known it for a while. Always inclined to fight shy of our crowd, shiest of Johnny, he fought shier still. But sometimes they met. And as soon as it was known they were in the same bar together, crowds would gather outside, kind of expectant. It got on Satan's nerves. He had to be so darned polite. Polite in earnest, mind you!—not in his usual way, which always had the hint about it that he was open for a rough-house at any time, fine gentleman though he might be. He wanted no rough-houses when Johnny was staying with him, so further and further north he went, and men saw he was funking, and he knew what they were saying. And he held it up for Johnny. Soon as he knew he was away, he came for Cleo. . . . Let it be known what he was going to do. Bragged about it. And Cleo went with him. She was piqued with Johnny. But Satan had only to whistle on most women, and they came. The . . . !"

Big Jim swore and paused, greatly moved. So furiously he drew at his cigar, it burned his beard. He spat it out, lit another.

"Maybe he was a bit braver than we thought," he continued. "Maybe he had banked on friends standing by him, or on raising a crowd against our crowd. . . . He had made a mistake either way. I reckon he was sorry. Our word was law then. As soon as it was known we had put the mark on him, every man that carried a gun along his usual beats was waiting to introduce him to his namesake. He had to disappear. And for five years nothing was heard of Satan Ferreira, neither by us nor by anybody else, search as Johnny did, search as we all did. But Cleo was found.

"Cleo was what Johnny was looking for mostly, and he found her himself. Most men would have lost her again, I reckon. She was under the Red Light, and the blight of the Light was on her. Yet he took her away. And what he would not do for her fair and proud, he did for her fallen. He turned his back on his old haunts and friends, and hit out with her to find some place where they weren't known.

"But he did not leave the sea—he couldn't. Most of his money had gone in that scheme, the rest in his search; and the story kept following them. She was glad to sail with him and keep moving on. Times we heard. Each time they were doing better. Then Johnny came back to us. Cleo was dead. Satan had fouled their hawse again.

"I have got to think pretty hard to realise now that such a man as Johnny Matheson ever was. Though once his thoughts were mine, and we looked as far along the same gun-sight, I can only wonder at him now. He's away beyond me. It shows me how I've gone down. He found Satan in an open, oarless, mastless boat, half-dead with thirst and starvation, a castaway—from what he never knew, and he spared him. Spared him because Cleo begged and cried. Begged and cried all day, while Satan towed behind them, and Johnny stamped here, stamped there, trying to make up his mind to heave a ballast pig into his boat and leave him to drown. But at dusk he gave him food and drink instead, a mast and a sail and oars, and slipped his painter. Which was the same as giving him life, for the weather was fine, and Satan was a seaman. And Satan followed their topsails, followed them in, and took Cleo away again—took her off the schooner while Johnny was ashore.

"Difficult to believe that she would go, isn't it? Ay! But Satan had only to whistle, as I've told you before, and a woman who had once felt his grip could never break it.

"Nome was the port. With the money he had stolen

from the schooner—he didn't leave a bit, and that hindered Johnny—Satan bought an outfit and hit north. But a couple of months later Johnny mushed an hour behind them, night and a blizzard coming on, and him due to arrive before either. Satan took the only way to stop him. He dumped Cleo. Flung her out on the track! She was all in, only deadweight. What did he care, with Johnny on his heels! And he got away, for Johnny stayed beside her. The devil knew his man. And they were snowed up. It killed her. A year later Johnny came south to put us wise—and to die. He had broken himself searching the Yukon, and all he had got was proof that Satan had sailed from Nome.

"That's all we got, too, and we searched the world. We heard of him here, and we heard of him there, in one place and in another. Off we would go, dropping everything we were doing, and it was dud every time.

"Stewart dropped his ticket one of the times. Poor old chap, he travelled furthest and hardest of us all.

"Hearing that a man like Fereira had sailed from a certain port, he shipped as a skipper and followed. He was broke at the moment, and could only follow that way. But it doesn't do to use a ship as you might a hired auto. He went five hundred miles in the opposite direction to what he should have gone and of course his owners wanted to know why. They got him unmastered. He was lucky. He could have been put away for piracy on the high seas, only the other skipper held his tongue. . . . That skipper was MacArthur, Davis. That's how we came on him. Decent of him, wasn't it?—for Stewart had held him up and forced his way aboard, half his crew behind him, knives out and everything. Not many skippers would have stood that off a stranger. It shows you what Stewart was, too. He hadn't known one of his crew an hour before he sailed. Yet there they were, ready to turn pirates, just because he gave the word. He was a hell of a man and a leader of men in those days.

"But he didn't find Satan. None of us did. He had

disappeared. We got no further than Johnny had got before he died. And here we are, breaking old ships, what's left of the men who could have reared a new nation, and set a clean man on its throne. Ay, ay. That's what Satan Ferreira did for us. It's a poor ending to what might have been a good tale.

"I don't know whether you quite see it that way, for all I've said, Davis. But it wasn't only Johnny Matheson's life he had spoilt. He had spoilt ours as well. He had made us miss our tide. After that scheme of ours failed, we never did anything worth while. Not what we should have done, at any rate. Big things we did, perhaps. Not what we could have done. We had the power, but our vision was not true. We let him head us off, time and time again. We let him bring a hate into our lives, and it ate us up, as all hates do. As well as losing Johnny, we lost our ideals, that's what it comes to. And now we're here. Ay . . ."

His cigar had gone out; he had been chewing the end. Roused at last from the absorption of his story by the bite of the tobacco, he paused and sat up sharply.

"Damn!" he said, and threw the butt away, and wiped his lips.

"And now we're here," he repeated, continuing, but in a reminiscent mood no longer. "And now I had better be quick and tell you what the end to all this is—what I could have done long ago, if I hadn't wanted to talk. Satan turned up again. That's his ship. We think he might still be aboard. It's up to you to find out. Get her broken as quickly as you can, and stand over her breakage. Do you understand?"

"Why do you think so, sir?" Davis ventured to ask.

"Ay, you may well ask, Davis," Big Jim confessed. "It's a pretty poor hope. Only Stewart and I would hold it, and only after all those years.

"We know this, however!—his crew turned on him before the end. He had driven them—he was always a driver!—and they had become frightened. She was a

real *Alabam*, you know. Fitted during the war, and slipped out on the quiet from a South American port. But he had made her a pirate. There was hell coming for them if they were caught aboard. So they shut him up and deserted her. That was their yarn, anyhow. They were picked up by one of our ships. The worst of it is the ship bringing them home for internment and trial was torpedoed and lost, and they were either all drowned, or they slipped away on the quiet. I've never been able to track one of them. Only got their yarn.

"But it was Satan right enough. I've proved that. And they guessed he had gone down with his ship in a storm that was coming, and hoped he had. It strikes me they had tried to scuttle her. Instead she was flung where you got her. I only heard a year ago she was there. Possibly he got clear. Very possibly they drowned him. I searched her for a month and found nothing; and by the look of her, plenty had been before me. But she is full of odd corners as you know, and the crash knocked her all squee-gee inside and made her worse. She is here to be broken and sifted. . . . How soon can you do it?"

"A week," said Davis. "I'll get the biggest hustle on this yard has ever seen, sir."

And in a week the *Alabama* had been stripped to ribs and keel, her breakage piled in ordered heaps ashore; and queer places had been found, but nothing in them, no sign of Satan Ferreira—not even in the furnace ash, which Stewart picked over, cinder by cinder, grain by grain.

It had been a vain hope that had brought her to Carn, a desperate chance taken by men desperate after long searching, a turning over of a pebble, the last pebble on a trail of many years. Yet neither Stewart nor Big Jim seemed disappointed. Davis it was who felt sick at heart, and showed what he was feeling; he had been so keen, so eager to help and serve.

He leaned against one of the long prone funnels and let them go away together, watched them go—two big

men, seamen ; seamen come ashore to break old ships. In that was their disappointment. Eidolon of their wasted lives, the yard and its scuffy scrap-heaps lay around him. And clearer vision had come to him, greater understanding ; he could look into the past and see what his chief had been ; into the time of which men had told him, before the era of the slate-blue coats and ministerial trousers, when no more gallant and gay a young sailor had been sailing the seas. Not Johnny Matheson had returned broken from the Yukon, but Johnny Matheson's soul. . . .

For weeks the breakage lay untouched where it had been dumped ashore. The rains washed it, the winds swept it, the greater seas drenched it with their spray. It rusted and wasted ; it sagged and sank. It became a sorry blotch in a sorry yard ; a nuisance to a busy man, hard-pressed for room. Yet Davis had not the heart either to have it removed or to ask Big Jim what should be done. And Big Jim said nothing, though often he went that way.

Then one morning a man ran screaming through the yard, a man who was mad.

He bit and kicked at the foreman who tripped him up and sought to secure him. Half a dozen men were needed to hold him down. And still he screamed. He was a tramp. Soot-covered, hairy and ragged, he writhed in the grip of his captors, a terrible figure—a figure of terror. The terror of him spoke to Davis, who had hurried to the scene.

"Where did he come from, Struthers ?" he enquired quickly of the foreman.

"Out of there, sir. That first funnel of the *Alabam*."

The funnel gaped a hundred yards away. To it Davis hastened ; he remembered gazing through its long straight length as it hung in the air, suspended from the crane that was slinging the *Alabama* ashore ; dreadfully filthy it had seemed. Now its further end was blocked by a *débris* pile. The greater part of its length was in

darkness. It was a rare hiding-place, a refuge where the tramp might have lain secure—if he had not become mad. Nearby, a night-watchman's lamp was lying. The under-manager lit it, stepped into the mouth of the great tube, and walked questingly forward.

Two thirds of the way along lay two valuable brasses. The tramp had come on a thieving expedition. Driven into hiding by the approach of a night-watchman, the watchman whose lamp Davis was carrying, he had been caught by the dawn and compelled to remain ; and what had ejected him had fallen upon him, loosened by the weathering, dislodged by the vibration his presence had caused. In horror Davis stared. The long search was done. At his feet lay a body, a small, shrivelled-up thing, victim of a mutinous crew—a man who had been hung in the funnel by a chain, and stuck by the heat to the side.

CHAPTER X

THE JUDGMENT OF JOHAN COULL

I

IN the days that followed the breaking of the *Alabama* and the discovery of the body of her commander, Davis noticed a change in Big Jim: he seemed to age—or to begin to show his age, though what that was Davis did not know. For thirty years at least, he knew, his chief had followed the sea: "I was sailing the schooner *Mary MacNaughton* then," the latter had said once when they were trying to fix the date of a certain happening, "and that is nigh on thirty years ago." From old Stewart he had learned, however, that Big Jim had been in command of one of his brother's pearlers before he was seventeen years old, and by that reckoning he might only be forty-six or thereabout—no great age, even if ten more years were added to it as allowance for error in the reckoning.

Yet *old* Big Jim seemed to be growing; Davis could not find a more expressive way of describing the change in him. His step was not so light. A listlessness had crept into his manner. The business no longer had the same interest for him. It was as though in yielding him the body of the man who had destroyed his happiness—Davis had no doubt now who *Johnny Matheson* was—it had served its purpose; accidentally, perhaps; not the purpose which he had founded it to serve; nevertheless one so great that he sought from it nothing more.

Bit by bit the undermanager found himself undertaking most of the work his chief had been wont to do. Big Jim was away a good deal and on his return did not make his usual effort to get abreast of what had happened in his absence; and while ordinarily this would have made little difference to Davis, just at this time he was unfit to do even his own work. For he had worked himself done. For the first time in his life he was feeling seriously unwell.

Not a single holiday had he taken during his period of service with the Carn Company. Salvage expeditions, an occasional trip to bring home an old ship for breaking, had sufficed. He had nowhere to go, no friends whose hospitality he would have thought of accepting, no relatives—at least, none that mattered. Somewhere he had an uncle and cousins; but they had shown no interest in him when he was a struggling, half-starved apprentice, and it had never occurred to him to think that now he had prospered they would have been prepared to welcome him.

Nor had he married. He had once wanted a girl. But she had taken someone else; he had been too backward to speak to her. Thereafter he had given the whole strength of his manhood to the sea, to the making of a name for himself as an engineer and as a man. Big Jim had heard of him, and had snapped at the chance of securing him for Carn when the news went round the sea howffs that he was broken. Thereafter he had given his strength to the Company, and more than his strength, out of regard for Big Jim. Hard work honestly performed, good service, loyalty, was the only thing he demanded and gave, the only gospel that he recognised, his sole End of Man. An anxious, worrying, hyper-sensitive ego, he sought thus to justify his existence, to himself, to his employer, and to Whoever had made him.

After his War struggle with Finket he should certainly have rested; that had been far more severe than ever he had told Big Jim. Instead, he had worked harder. There had been more to do. He was nearly spent when the

Death Ship came to Carn. Not yet recovered from his experience aboard her, he had gone on the *Alabama* salvage; and in the Gulf old malaria propensities had reasserted themselves; already a sick man, he had faced the strenuous task of bringing the cranky vessel home. Sicker still, he was now trying to face the extra work and worry caused by Big Jim. And for once the latter, generally the most noticing of men, especially where Davis was concerned, failed to notice anything amiss with him.

Fortunately, before he collapsed altogether, one of Mrs. Martin's visits fell due. She came hurrying down to the office to enquire from him what ailed her son, discovered immediately how greatly he was ailing himself, and ordered him off to bed—not in his own house, however.

"I have two of you to look after, it seems," she said wrathfully. "You will come home with me. I'm surprised at James letting you carry on in such a state."

And up in his room in his chief's home he heard the echoes of her flyting; he could not help chuckling. Big Jim noticed the lingering traces of his glee when he came, shortly afterwards, to see him.

"Yes," he ruefully admitted, "I've been catching it. Working to death the only man in the firm worth tuppence—that's how she put it. I like the *tuppence*. Gad! when my mother gets flourishing that old gamp of hers she has me quaking every time. Never been able to get over my terror of her. Sorry, though, Davis, I'd no idea you were so off colour. You have always been such a glutton for work, that I'm afraid we have all got into the habit of taking you too much for granted. My mother has got you in hand now. What she means to do with you, I don't know, but we'll both need to sing pretty small."

What Mrs. Martin did do was to insist on the taking up by the firm of several important salvage contracts. It was essential that Davis should leave the yard for a time, she told her son; he must go as a passenger on one of

the expeditions. That he might be a passenger in reality, Big Jim himself must go to take care of him.

"You both need a change," was what she said to Davis. "And, Mr. Davis," she added anxiously. "Do try to interest James in the work as much as possible. He is passing through a very trying time."

So it was that they came to salve the *Warpindi*, a large liner, sunk by gunfire in a North Sea shallows a few days before Armistice was signed. And they had scarcely been a week over the vessel when there came a strange tale. Divers were down. One of them, not long descended, was pulled to the surface again at his urgent signal; he spoke excitedly to Big Jim. At once the latter and MacArthur donned diving-dress and went down with him.

2

Old Stewart, painting the outside panelling of the saloon, saw the stir but went on with his painting; it was nothing to him what others did while he had work of his own to do. Thus Davis, lying within on a deck chair, knew nothing of what was happening until nearly an hour afterwards, when Big Jim returned from the sea-bed, bringing the story with him. It was evening then. He was dozing. At first he scarcely grasped what his chief was saying, but seeing old Stewart listening with unusual intentness, and MacArthur hardly able to restrain himself from intervening in the tale, he became suddenly awake.

"What's that, sir?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"There's five of them," Big Jim repeated.

"They lie in beauty side by side," murmured MacArthur.

Davis hitched himself up in his chair.

"Do you mean to say," he enquired, "that five German submarines are lying down there, and undamaged?"

. . . Well, if it had been anyone else, I would have had a look at the steward's cellar before believing them."

He spoke a little querulously, for the heat of a very hot day had tried him severely, placed though his chair had been in the draught of the open larboard and starboard doors. Big Jim reached over him and filled his empty glass with iced lime juice before replying.

"If I had not seen them, Davis," he said, "I would scarcely have believed it myself. But there they are, not forty feet from the *Warpindi's* stern—just under us. Jackson missed his direction when he went down, and walked straight into them. First one, then two, with one athwart on top, and then the other; almost as if someone had chosen the place and popped them all down together. And not a plate started on one of them—leastways, as far as we could see. It's mighty strange; and I've heard of some strange things at sea in my time."

"You said something about a freighter being there as well, MacArthur," he continued, after a pause, and addressing his captain. "I didn't see her. Where was she lying?"

"Just beyond the furthest away sub, sir," replied the skipper. "She is on her side, half her bottom torn out amidships, though whether by mine, torpedo, or collision I would not like to say. I found her by tumbling up against a great pile of her coal."

"Did ye happen to notice her name?" Stewart asked him.

"I did—the *Arctic*. But where she hailed from I couldn't make out. The weed has her badly. Been there at least a year before the subs., I should say."

"I missed her altogether," Big Jim admitted. "My light began to get bad just about there, so I hauled out. I noticed you stayed down a bit longer. Reckon we could find a good many of her kind lying about if we liked to look for them. It's the submarines that strike me as queerest. I could understand one being there——"

"So could I," interrupted Davis. "Or even two.

Some of the Hun boats leaked like sieves under pressure, and might easily have filled—a good many did. But *five*! It's a bit remarkable. . . . Will you raise them, sir?"

"I don't think so, Davis," replied Big Jim, shaking his head doubtfully. "Though if they are really undamaged except for leaks it would not be difficult, and I must say I'm a bit curious. But shift your chair up now. The steward wants to come in."

The steward had appeared to set the table for the evening meal, and was standing,—the cloth on his arm, his hands filled with knives and forks,—gazing doubtfully at the deck chair stretched across his pantry doorway. Languidly Davis rose, folded up his chair, and went out on deck, his nerves too apprehensive to let him remain through the jarring clatter of the table-setting; and outside he remained until it was done, his elbows resting on the hot deck rail, his gaze on the oily sea, in his mind thoughts of the five mysterious craft beneath him: how they had come to be there. It was a strange tale his chief had told.

A midsummer night was settling down. Dew was falling. But no coolth was in the air; no evening breeze had come to clear the ship of the heat with which a long spell of torrid, windless weather had filled her. He responded unwillingly to the steward's call. Dinner in that stuffy saloon had little appeal for him; and he lingered in the entrance alley, looking in at the men inside, more than ever unwilling to enter; for two engineers had joined the party, and the over-crowded place reeked with tobacco-smoke.

MacArthur was telling the newcomers of the submarines; they were listening intently, now and then interrupting him with a question. Back to the bulkhead, his great shoulders almost on a level with a port-hole, Big Jim sat playing solitaire. He picked out the little red balls with a delicacy of touch remarkable in one so huge; but it was an unnatural game for him to play. The favourite

chess-board and men had been left behind. With sorrow Davis had noticed how greatly his skill and interest in that game had waned. They had played only once or twice recently, and Big Jim had lost.

The draught from the open port-holes was blowing through his beard where it lay, part as usual, and pushed out of the way over his shoulder; occasionally loose strands would fall down among his fingers. To push them back again was the only movement he made apart from the playing, so completely absorbed did he appear to be in the futile pickings up and settings down.

On the other side of the table Stewart sat watching him, but to Davis the mate seemed far more interested in what MacArthur and the engineers were saying; at every question asked he would twitch his head round a little as though the better to hear the reply. Suddenly he turned and put a question himself:

"Did ye notice whether *Arctic* was the only name the freighter had, MacArthur?" he enquired.

Davis entered, his curiosity aroused. Stewart, the dour old Scotsman that he was, seldom spoke, seldom showed interest in anything, and never asked a question unless for very good reason.

"Hello, Davis. Been having a squint overside at those submarines?" MacArthur asked facetiously, as he noticed the undermanager. "What was that you said, Stewart?" he continued immediately, directing his attention to the mate. "*Arctic* the only name?—I don't know. It was her stern I looked at, and as she is on her starboard side, the name was pretty high up. All I saw was A-R-C-T-I. The second C has dropped off, I expect. Now that you have mentioned it, though, I shouldn't be a bit surprised if there was a second name. There was plenty room for it. The lettering began well to her port side. Jove! that would make her one of old Johan Coull's boats. They were all *Arctic*-something. . . Oh, my God!"

His face suddenly became grave.

"My God," he repeated slowly. "Young Johnny Coull must be lying down there, and I knew him as well as I know anyone here. She's the *Arctic Queen*."

"I was thinking that," grunted Stewart.

He turned to Big Jim, as though to say something more; Davis had seldom seen him so animated. But the entrance of the steward to light the lamp preparatory to serving dinner, checked him; and no one else spoke until the man, a curious fellow, had gone away.

They were eager to do so, however, or to listen. The name of Coull, and the tragedy connected with it, was more than well known to them. MacArthur's disclosure meant that they had stumbled over the threshold of that tragedy. Old Johan Coull, the elder of the two men who had borne that name, had owned the Arctic Line, a famous Scandinavian line of many vessels, liners, whalers, and tramps. Although a millionaire, he had captained several of them, and won great renown by his voyages into the world's least frequented seas. Two of his ships, and only two, had been lost in the war—and he had been drowned in one, his son in the other.

Young Johnny Coull, for thus the son was known, had been following in his father's way, and was bidding fair to become the greater sailor. During the war, at a time when ships had almost ceased to cross the North Sea, he had gallantly persisted in running the blockade to bring the coal so sorely needed by his countrymen. But a torpedo had found him in the end. Old Johan had set out in a whaler to hide his grief in the Greenland Seas. A few weeks later, a British Q-boat had picked up a lifeboat containing all that was left of his crew; a lifeboat submerged to the gunnel, its oars and sails gone, its tanks and bottom pierced with auger holes, its eight occupants dead, save one, unconscious and dying—sure evidence to the Allied world of the work of the German submarine. And Big Jim had commanded that Q-boat, Stewart his second-in-command.

"You were going to say something," Davis hastened

to remind the latter, as a clatter of dishes in the pantry broke the silence.

"Do you mind where we picked up that lifeboat?" said the mate to Big Jim.

Big Jim nodded.

"Where?" demanded Davis.

"Just about ten miles north of where we are now," said Big Jim quietly.

"Oh, the swine!" MacArthur exclaimed. "They must have sunk Old Johan on top of his son."

"It looks very like it," admitted Big Jim.

He pushed away his solitaire board, and leaned further back against the bulkhead.

"It's an extraordinary coincidence," he said. "And perfectly extraordinary that we, of all people, should tumble up against it.—I knew Old Johan, MacArthur, even better than you knew Young Johnny. But the most remarkable thing to me is those submarines being there as well. Is that coincidence, too?"

"It can't be, sir," said Davis. "There's none of it coincidence at all. It's far too extraordinary. Old Johan must have come here visiting the spot where Young Johnny was drowned, and those five submarines caught and sank him. And I'll bet anything you like he sank them as well."

"How?"

"I don't know. Possibly he and his crew were taken aboard as prisoners, and they scuttled them out of revenge for Young Johnny."

"I believe you have struck it, by Jove!" burst out MacArthur. "Old Johan thought the world of Young Johnny, and so did the gang who usually sailed with him. It's just the sort of thing they would make up their minds to do as soon as they saw they were going to be collared."

"And what do you make o' that boat-load o' dead folk that we picked up?" asked Stewart.

"That's the strongest link of all," maintained MacArthur, warming up to his theory. "Those were the

people who did not fancy drowning. So they hid. And the Germans simply left them with a sinking ship and stove-in boats, rather than waste time looking for them. It's pretty convincing. Don't you think so?"

"I doubt there's more in it than that," the mate grunted.

"You could test it, sir, by raising one of those submarines," Davis suggested.

"Ay," Big Jim agreed. "And I admit I'd like to get to the bottom of it. But do you think it worth while?"

"Rather," answered Davis, without hesitation. "What a story, if it is true."

"We'll see if the weather looks like holding tomorrow," Big Jim promised. "The *Warpindi's* our game, after all, and we must get her up while the calm lasts. Better not say anything to the hands about what we think, or there will be precious little interest left for her. . . . Now, steward," he continued, raising his voice. "You have heard all we are going to say, so get the food on the table. And if you let a word get for'ard, it's in another ship you'll do your next trip. Quick's the word."

The steward hastily brought in the dinner; the two engineers departed to eat in their own quarters; and no more was said of Johan Coull and his son—nor much of anything else, Big Jim seeming indisposed for conversation, and MacArthur, usually the wit of the party, sombre from thought of Young Johnny Coull. But for once Stewart volunteered a general remark at a meal time, and that about the heat: he had never experienced such a spell of it in the North Sea before, he confessed to Davis.

Because of it, and also because of the disturbed nature of his thoughts, Davis could eat little; and the same causes kept him from sleeping, when, at the close of the tedious meal, at last he could escape to his berth. All the sleep-bringing tricks he could remember or devise, he tried; he flung the clothes from him, without either bringing peace to his throbbing mind, or ease to his

tortured frame. One after the other, he heard his companions turn in. Unable to endure the irritation of the useless struggle any longer, he slipped down from his bunk and went out on deck.

The deck-plates were still warm to his feet, but the air was cooler. He took long draughts of it into his lungs. The muscles of his forearms thrilled gratefully to the wetness of the dew as it struck through the thin cloth of his pyjamas from the rail. Beneath him the gig gently rubbed against the *Seabird's* side. The sea lay still and inviting, waveless, in the slack of the tides. There were haze patches showing faintly against the darkness of the further waters ; but his sailor's eye could note no fog danger. Acting on impulse, he swarmed down the rope-ladder to the gig, cast off, and gently pulled astern.

The gig had been lowered and left in the water for the seams to close that the heat had opened. There were several inches of leakage in her bottom. When about a cable's length from the *Seabird*, he unshipped oars and lay down in it, cool for the first time for days.

So at ease did he feel he could have slept there, undisturbed even by the faintest remembrance of the grim drama so lately troubling his mind. But at regular intervals he raised his head to judge of his position by the lights of the *Seabird* and her consorts. Each time he might as well have lain in peace ; the gig had hardly moved.

It was from no sudden apprehension that he was drifting away, that he rose with a start from the bottom of the boat and looked over the side—not at the *Seabird*—in the opposite direction ; and a chill struck through his body and soul that did not come from the water. His hair rose stiff on his head ; his flesh congealed and contracted all down his backbone at the touch of some deep and primordial fear. Not a hundred yards from him, was a sight he had never beheld in the wildest of his dreams. Without a sound, a ship was rising from the depths of the sea.

A full-rigged ship ! Already her masts and yards were exposed to the level of her main topmast crosstrees. Slowly she rose higher, her upper topsail yards breaking above the surface, first the main, then the fore, then the mizzen—she was rising in almost perfect trim ; the point of a high-flying jib-boom appeared almost simultaneously with the cross-jack yard on her mizzen. Soon he could make out her poop and forecastle. There she rode motionless, her hull submerged, but the lines of it clear to him. For from truck to keel, from counter to cut-water, she glowed with a ghostly, white phosphorescence, that clothed every stay, every brace and halliard, and hung in long streamers from every cap and end ; and from every point of her, dropped in a fine, glittering shower into the sea.

A phantom ship ! That was his vision. With the thought departed the physical effects of his fear. He stirred, slid on to one of the thwarts, shipped the oars, stroked into the direction of the *Seabird*, then resolutely shut his eyes and rowed away.

He was under the *Seabird's* stern when next he opened them, and the vision had disappeared. Gently he sculled to the rope-ladder, and with a thankful exclamation, made fast. He had been afraid ; not of that ship—after the first involuntary panic, it had been but a warning symptom—but that the rest of his sanity would leave him before he could make good his return. The severity of his illness had at last dawned on him. Ships did not rise from the depths of the sea unless to men faced with serious breakdown. He had struggled with his angry nerves too long, and now they were bent on their revenge.

He clambered aboard, hurried to Big Jim Martin's berth, and roused him.

" I'd like you to look me over, sir," he said. " I feel a bit queer. Just seen the Flying Dutchman rise out of the sea."

Big Jim was out of his bunk in an instant, and had caught him by the shoulders.

"Stewart," he called.

The mate came in, was told the story, and without a remark fell-to to help Big Jim. They stripped off the soaking pyjamas, towelled Davis vigorously, and got him into his bunk. They did not attempt to distract him with useless remarks or questions. To them there was nothing strange in his tale. They also, regarded it as a warning symptom. Each in his time had seen the Flying Dutchman come tearing up into the gale, and knew the condition that evolved such a phenomenon. Their sole concern was to aid the comrade whose state had called from the deep a still greater phantasm. Deftly Big Jim took his temperature, felt his pulse, quietly put questions. His relief was obvious as he gave the result of his diagnosis.

"I was afraid of sunstroke at first, Davis," he said. "But it's not that, thank goodness. It's your nerves. This trip was meant to pull you together a bit, but it is making you worse. Back you go to-morrow in one of the other ships, and I guess my mother will see that you stay away from the yard. Mix him up a drink, MacArthur."

The skipper had appeared while he was speaking, roused from his sleep by the unwonted stirrings. Without a single curious query he began the drink mixing; and while he mixed, Davis repeated his tale.

In the midst of it he noticed Stewart, at a sign from Big Jim, follow the latter out into the saloon. Thence came the sound of their voices for a little while, then the sound of their departing footsteps. The gig was tied up not far from his open port-hole; he thought he heard men getting into her and the splash of oars, and stopped talking to MacArthur to raise his ear to the opening to listen. But he heard nothing more, and thinking himself mistaken, he lay down again, and resumed the conversation. A few minutes later, however, he knew that his ears had not tricked him. The gig bumped against the

ship's side. The rope-ladder rattled as from men scaling it hastily. Quick footsteps sounded across the deck-plates and into the saloon, and he leaped from his bunk as Big Jim and Stewart entered.

"Man! It's a ship right enough," the former exclaimed. "And what's more, it's the *Arctic Belle*."

"Old Johan Coull's ship!" exclaimed MacArthur, his excitement almost choking him. "What private locker o' Davy Jones' is this we have tumbled into?"

"Are you sure, sir?" Davis enquired incredulously.

"Quite sure, Davis," Big Jim replied, calmer than any of them. "The dawn is coming up. We will be able to see her from the deck in half a minute. Come outside."

He turned as he spoke, and they followed him out on deck, crowding on each other's heels. Along the eastern horizon a faint lightness was beginning to appear. Against it, dim but unmistakable, hung the silhouette of a ship.

They tumbled into the gig, and closed with the stranger. The stars had paled. There was a greater blackness on the face of the waters than the night had imposed. Darkly she towered above them, a great nebulous mass, rank with the tang of sea-growths and dead fishes, only the vague outline of her top-hamper still to be discerned; for the phosphorescence which had enabled Davis to see her so clearly, had died, save where it glowed faintly in patches of greatest blackness; yet Big Jim was certain as to whose ship she was, Stewart and MacArthur hardly less certain. They lay on their oars in her loom and waited for morning. awed, silent, afraid to approach more closely in the darkness.

At last the shadows came scurrying over the sea. With the rush of the summer dawning, the light of the morn broke above the horizon. The strange craft lay revealed, a ship sunk to the level of poop and forecastle, a monstrous slimy thing from the bed of the sea. The weed covered her; not an inch of her planking or cordage was visible. It made a sponge of her hull, grew thick

round her masts, hung in huge masses from her lower spars, festooned every stay, and interlaced between the yards as close as ever canvas filled them.

"That is why she phosphoresced so much, Davis," whispered Big Jim. "There can't be so much wrong with your nerves, if they could stand what she must have looked like last night."

"Do you think it is the weed that has lifted her, sir?" MacArthur enquired in a whisper.

"No. It's that.—Do you see it, Stewart?"

Big Jim pointed to a rounded mass of weed, swelling a little above the surface of the water between the mizzen and the mainmast. Stewart nodded, but did not speak.

"That's her hatch tarpaulin bellied out," Big Jim continued, still speaking in the whisper in which each of them unconsciously was speaking. "She must be half full of some kind of gas, and the hot weather has brought her up. One thing certain now—she's the *Arctic Belle*. Gad! We've struck something big this time."

"First the submarine. Then Young Johnny Coull's ship. Now old Johan's," MacArthur recapitulated. "And she's at anchor, too. Do you notice, sir?" "Whatever has she been doing here?"

"Ay," growled Stewart.

"We'll get a cradle under her while this calm lasts, and try to find out. Back to the *Scabird*. Quick," Big Jim ordered. "The sun will crackle up that tarpaulin once it gets overhead, and down she'll go."

MacArthur and Davis dashed the oars into the rowlocks and pulled strongly away. Boats were setting out from the other vessels, the growing light having discovered to their crews the presence of their strange companion. But at Big Jim's signal they closed on the gig, and he issued his instructions. Ere the sun had well cleared the horizon, the *Arctic Belle* was safe from any immediate danger of sinking.

The big steel buoyancy cylinders, brought for the *Warpindi's* raising, had been towed alongside and strapped

together in pairs by hawsers passing underneath her keel. Divers were on board, clearing the way to lazarette and forepeak. There the patent flexible air-envelopes were to be placed, which, when inflated, would help to keep her afloat when her hatches were opened. Soon they were in position and filling. Slowly she lifted her bulwark out of the sea.

But her waist was filled with a mass of weed and slime, which held her under. Strong-hose jets from the *Seabird* cleared it. Freed of so weighty a burden her deck rose flush with the surface of the sea; and continued to rise, slowly, almost imperceptibly.

"It's but a wee hole that sank her, to let the water out again as slow as that," grunted Old Stewart. "She will easy stand the hatches being opened. The pumps will soon suck her dry."

The deduction was incontrovertible, and Big Jim at once led aboard a working-party, armed with axes and crowbars for the staving-in of the hatches. Davis noticed that the men walked gingerly, casting nervous glances about them. With the weed hanging rankly from the spars overhead, it was more like entering a grotto raised temporarily from the depths of the sea. And the smell of the sea-bottom was stronger, almost nauseating. But the odour of the gas that rushed through the gaps made in the hatches was distinctive enough, and he looked quickly round to see that none of the men were smoking.

"It's acetylene, sir," he exclaimed in surprise.

"Ay. She was lit and warmed throughout with it," said Big Jim, "and the sea has gradually eaten in among her carbide. That's what has brought her up. Go and see how her waterline is behaving."

But the releasing of the gas seemed to have produced no effect on the whaler's buoyancy, and soon two powerful centrifugal pumps were sucking at the water in her hold.

"She's rising fast, sir," reported Davis, leaving the bulwarks and rejoining his chief. "Looks as if she'd been scuttled."

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"She must have been," said Big Jim. "Served the same way as that lifeboat. You know, Davis"—his glance roved over the ruin—"this makes me sad—or savage, I am not sure which. There was not a finer ship afloat. Nor a finer sailor," he added in an undertone. "I wonder if he is still aboard! Let's have a look into the saloon."

They squelched aft towards the poop and climbed it by a ladder, weed-filled to its rail top. With difficulty their sea-boots dug for foothold; their hands slipped on the slimy rails. On the poop itself the weed was knee-deep. At nearly every step forward, things wriggled from underneath their soles.

"She will never stand all this top-hamper when she lifts," said Big Jim, gazing doubtfully from the overgrown poop to the overgrown masts. "Hey, MacArthur," he called. "Send the hands aloft to clear her upper rigging. She will turn turtle if we're not careful."

He stopped to watch the carrying out of his order; but Davis waded on, his curiosity too great to allow him to delay. He reached the saloon entrance and passed within. Yet with one foot still lingering on the threshold, he paused there, hesitating. . . .

It was a great place, broad, long and high, unusually so; fit skipper's quarters for the great skipper who had lived there—probably died there. Yet the undermanager's hesitation sprang from another cause. Outside, the weed had choked the broad decks, fouled the clean timbers, and made grotesques of the stately masts and spars. Here there was no weed. A fine mud overlaid each object; it did but make each line and surface more severely straight and plain. The place was clean, with a cleanliness almost holy. For the doors had been shut tight until the divers forced their entry; the ports had been closed; almost as if, thought Davis, the spirit of old Johan Coull had thus secured itself a sanctuary from the corruption of the sea.

But from without sounded the voices of the salvagers,

the crash and thud of the falling weed, the splash and gurgle of the water drawn by the pumps from the hold : human sounds. He began his inspection, yet treading softly, as though in fear of disturbing some silent sleeper.

No one slept there, however, in sleep or death. The berths were empty, left just as their former occupants had left them when they took their departure, some to die in that scuttled lifeboat, some in ones and twos, perhaps, to those five—— In the undermanager's heart a new wonder had eclipsed the old wonder of those sunken submarines. Big Jim came in, followed by Stewart and MacArthur. In silence he waited for them to make the discovery that he had made.

4

They came from the berths and joined him, MacArthur last, hardest to convince of the three.

"D'ye ever see anything like it?" he exclaimed in amazement. "He has had a harem aboard with him."

It was true. Six of the ten berths had contained women—girls, rather; girls who had worn the fine dresses that Davis had seen hanging in the cupboards, and the shapely boots and shoes littered about the floors. And on a whaler, bound for the Greenland Seas!

"There was a woman in that lifeboat," said Stewart. "The kind that would have worn these bits o' things."

He left them at once, and passed out of sight into an alleyway, that led from the forward end of the saloon.

"We said nothing about her for the sake of Old Johan," Big Jim explained.

"A straighter man never sailed the seas," murmured MacArthur. "There is a lot more in this than we can see at present."

"Had he any womenfolk in his family?" asked Davis.

"None," Big Jim replied. "There was only himself, and Young Johnny."

"It's no' a whaler, this, at all," grunted Stewart, reappearing in the saloon. "Come ben here."

They followed him through the alleyway and down a companion, that descended to the 'tween decks and thence straight on, apparently, to the depths of the ship. But it was on to the 'tween decks that he led them, through a doorway that opened from the companion; and they saw the great space of the upper main hold stretching before them, still flooded knee-deep, still reeking with the odour of acetylene gases, but little at first of what it contained; for the only light that lit the place was that streaming scantily through the breach in the hatches, whence the glinting pump-pipes descended deep down into the lower hold. And what they did see, they could scarcely bring themselves to believe.

"It's surely never a court?" whispered Davis at last.

"Looks blurry like it," muttered MacArthur.

"It is," said Big Jim soberly.

Against the further wall of the ship was a judge's bench; on one side of it, a jurymen's enclosure, a prisoner's dock on the other. There were benches and desks. The scheme was clear. Someone had planned to sit in judgment here—who?—and on whom?—and to what end?

"If they caught him trying this game," Big Jim muttered, "it is easy to understand that scuttled life-boat."

He plunged boldly through the water in the direction of a door in the forward bulkhead, immediately in front of which the dock had been set. So quickly he moved, the others could not overtake him. But he stopped of his own accord at the sound of a heavy crash on deck, a crash that was immediately followed by a chorus of shouts and cries from the crew.

"For the love of mike, come on deck, sir," a man called out, poking his head hastily through the breach in the hatches.

"Gad! I hope no one has fallen," Big Jim exclaimed

turning immediately and splashing towards the companion.

But no one had fallen. The crash had come from a heavy mass of weed that had slithered down from the mainmast, clearing the lower yards as it fell ; and beneath the main yard were grouped the crew, unhurt, staring up at something that swung above their heads ; something still enmeshed and held together by the weed—the skeleton of a man ; a man who had been hanged by the neck.

Stewart and MacArthur hurried forward. Davis started to follow. Seeing Big Jim lift an axe, however, and dart below again, he turned and raced after him.

“Do you think it is Old Johan they have hung there ?” he enquired excitedly, catching up with him at the beginning of the ’tween decks.

“No, Davis,” Big Jim answered gravely. “Johan was a giant. It is someone who came out of this door to stand his trial here. . . . Stand clear.”

With a swing of his massive shoulders the axe came up and round and down. The whole bulkhead trembled and groaned, so tremendous was the blow ; the door started almost the width of its frame. But its timbers had swollen. The jambs held it tight as he pressed with his shoulder, and continued to hold it even when Davis added his pressure. Then it suddenly gave, tumbling them within. They found themselves sprawling on the floor of the forehold, a place darker than the one whence they had stumbled. But not dark enough ! Davis felt Big Jim grab him and drag him outside,—out and away from that silent company into which they had intruded : men sitting waiting there, waiting to stand their trial like that other, thirty or forty of them, drowned in their chains.

5

They came to a halt in Old Johan Coull's saloon.

"Young Johnny's death must have made him mad," said Big Jim solemnly. "A kindlier man never sailed. Go and tell MacArthur to see the hands off the ship. They mustn't get to know. Get all gear back to the *Seabird*, and tow the camels clear."

"And the pumps?"

"Leave them. We must find out what happened."

Davis went on his mission. When he returned Big Jim had descended the companion again, and stood leaning against the side, gazing pensively down at the receding water.

"He is down here," he said, and Davis did not venture to question him.

Quickly the pumps sucked the water away, and they heard the sound of the leak bursting in. Stewart and MacArthur had joined them by then; Davis had told them. Stewart came direct, but MacArthur from a stealthy visit to that door in the forward bulkhead. "My God!" he whispered to Davis, nodding expressively.

They had brought flash-lamps with them. Big Jim took one and pushed on. A narrow alleyway led from the foot of the companion, the lower hold on one side, a row of storerooms on the other. Guided by the sound of the leak he advanced along it.

"There he is," he said suddenly, stopping and holding the lamp steady.

A pace or two away was the end of the alleyway. Against a storeroom door—the last of the row—as though in the act of breaking it down, leant a huge man.

"It's Johan," murmured Stewart.

Davis drew back, awed. But Big Jim gently took the body in his arms and set it upright, away from the door. With his own strength he completed what the dead man had almost done. They looked within. In

the light of the lamps three white spouts of water showed gushing from the vessel's side. A large auger stuck out from a fourth uncompleted. But another sight it was that held their gaze. In the far corner, locked in each other's arms, stood a dead German sailor and a dead girl. . . .

"He was probably an old sweetheart. And she set him free. And he scuppered the lifeboats—the pumps also, very likely, and by night. Then they went down there to sink the ship and to die together. Old Johan followed them too late."

Big Jim was speaking. They were up on deck, raising the pumps out of the hold, unaided by any of the men.

"Women are wonderful," he continued, speaking almost to himself. "The best and the worst. And the worst more wonderful than the best. That girl down there—a decoy—God knows what——" He checked himself abruptly. "Stave in that forward hatch, Stewart," he ordered. "We'll just let her go down."

Davis stole aft and closed the saloon doors.

*What 20th name is
leave my name is
Amarnath Tew
Amrind*

CHAPTER XI

IN DEEP WATERS

THEY salved the *Warpindi*. Fortunately it proved easy. Quickly they were able to leave the ill-omened shallows. And other ships they salved. Davis grew well. But Big Jim did not alter. Though afloat he seemed more his old self, his interest in the shore part of the business did not revive. The day was coming, Davis felt, when his chief would leave Carn and return to his former life at sea. Yet the day did not come ; nor did it come. The sea intervened. The *Seabird* was posted at Lloyds as an overdue vessel, later as missing. Aboard her were Big Jim and Davis, MacArthur, Stewart and a full salvage crew.

They sailed from Carn in quest of a ship which had been abandoned, driven north and iced on the coast of Greenland the year before. Now reported adrift and apparently sound, she was well worth securing. Other companies sent out vessels. The *Seabird* outstripped them, however, and so steamed into the heart of the peril from which they were able to turn and flee. When it came, darkness was down, Davis was seated with Big Jim at the evening meal.

MacArthur had gone to his berth. Stewart was on the bridge. There Big Jim meant to join the mate as soon as he was finished, for all day the weather had been peculiar. Though the glass had remained steady, there had been strong electric and magnetic disturbances ; Stewart had seen the death fires, full sunlight though it

was, and not a compass aboard but had varied. Yet what was coming even Stewart did not know. It gave no further warning. Over a clear skyline it swooped, and along a calm sea. Big Jim lighting a cigar, Davis peeling an apple, the steward stepping out of the pantry with the coffee—the three of them became suddenly still, petrified, at the sound of a howl.

No human voice or voices made it. In an instant it grew out of nothing, spread everywhere, and absorbed every other sound. The next it passed. The next—Davis felt no shock, nor experienced any sense of motion, but he found himself lying along the angle of ceiling and partition, and staying there. Above him, sprawled out on an almost perpendicular floor, his arm round the base of a fixed chair, was his chief. The steward had disappeared, hurled through the lee alleyway and overboard. The *Seabird* was on her beam ends. Over her was pouring and roaring the sea.

Yet up she was going, hurtling upwards, half bow on to the fury. Someone in the moment of disaster had put her helm down and saved her from overwhelming, someone who still fought to bring her under control. She righted suddenly, fell over on her other beam. Davis catapulted across the saloon. Out of mid-air Big Jim snatched him, and pinned him to the floor. Up she still hurtled, up and up and up. Then he heard the sea falling from her and thrashing along her keel, felt her bound clear, and plunge down; down through and out of the roaring, down into a stillness as appalling—down on to a gently-heaving sea. The fury had passed. The *Seabird* swished forward on an even keel. And in the saloon the electric-light was burning. The floor quivered to the beat of an engine running true.

Out on deck they saw what had beset them; giddily they had staggered thither, MacArthur stumbling after them from his berth. Astern loomed an immense mountain range, a mountain range of water, a gigantic tidal-wave. Over it they had come, steered by an old

man's cunning hand. Still towering huge above the sea, it sped out of sight as they gazed.

Stewart spoke quietly from the bridge to them.

"We ran up between two crests," he said. "They closed just abaft the beam and lifted her over, otherwise we would have been a waster. . . . Do you see yon?"

He pointed forward—a flick of a finger, as calmly done as though towards a ship on the horizon. Over the horizon instead was rising a cloud, so riven by lightning that it seemed on fire. Its light had lit the wave; neither moon nor stars were visible. A glimmer then, now a fearsome glare, it was tinting the zenith and swiftly driving darkness from the sky.

"It's the end of the world," said MacArthur with grim humour. "And that's hell."

"It's a hell of a hurricane coming you mean," said Big Jim. "Get to it! Quick, or we're done. . . . All hands! All hands!"

Bellowing, he sprang up the bridge ladder and ran to the wheel. All hands were already assembling—all that could come; five men were overboard, three others seriously injured—a third of the crew. But the ship was sound. Stripped though she was of everything movable above decks, everything movable broken below, she was fit to fight for her life again, fit as any ship at sea. Fitter because of the men who manned her! . . . Yet for twenty days she drove northward, hove-to, helpless in the grip of the fiercest hurricane that any of them had known.

It came in the wake of the tidal-wave; first wind, so strong that it roused no sea—it shrieked past the *Seabird*, and the spindrift it carried froze, so great was its speed, and raked her like grape-shot; then a lull and an instant, enormous swell, over which the little vessel bounded, into which she plunged, while the thunder reverberated incessantly in her vitals, and the lightning painted her in phantom hues; then wind again, in furious, frantic gusts, that tore up the swells and piled them together

into writhing, leaping, breaking, mountainous masses, which she dodged, which she fought, her crew, every one of them, gashed, bloody, breathless, almost senseless—which would have overwhelmed her but for the steadying hand of the waxing storm, which brought out of the fierce tumult a fiercer order, lengthening the seas, yet making them more mountainous still.

Three times Big Jim tried to steam against it. Each time the effort was vain. Each time, her bearings red-hot and screaming, all her great power unthrottled, the *Seabird* did but hold her own; and not all her master's skill would have prevented her from foundering had the efforts been sustained.

She shipped so much water during the third, the last and most desperate, that her fires were extinguished—the sea poured down her funnel; the back-wash flowed in a solid mass the level of the bridge. Yet gallantly she rose. Stewart and MacArthur cast out a sea-anchor. Until it dragged, Big Jim made crafty use of the last of her steering way to keep her head on, and so saved her from going down. Thereafter they let her drive, for the gale increased. And nearer and nearer they came each day to the barrier-ice of the Pole.

After the tenth day the Arctic night closed on them. Through darkness they staggered, buffeted on and on, under a sky from which the storm had driven every star, over a sea whose sole radiance was the phosphorescence of breaking waters. The cold grew intense. Ice formed thick on the vessel. Yet no ice was seen afloat, nor its warring heard. The tidal-wave had broken its grip on the sea, and the hurricane, like a gigantic broom, had swept and was sweeping northward the shattered bergs and floes, leaving a broad lane of open water along which the *Seabird* was being driven.

“Lucky for us,” Davis thought. “Lucky for us,” he said one day after overhearing a remark made by Stewart to Big Jim concerning the absence of the ice.

They were sitting in the saloon, the three of them,

close together on one of the settees. MacArthur was at the wheel.

"Is it?" growled Stewart dourly in response to the interjection.

"Surely it is?" persisted the undermanager, looking at the mate in some surprise. "If we touched even a cubic yard going at this pelt we'd go straight to the bottom?"

"Mebbe it would be better if we did," growled Stewart.

"Why?"

The mate did not reply. His silence made Davis suddenly uneasy. He remembered a glance that had passed between the old man and his chief, when, after the failure of the last attempt to steam against the storm, they had gathered in the wheelhouse in obedience to Big Jim's summons, MacArthur and Stewart to tell of the laying out of the sea-anchor, himself to report the condition of things below. It had made him a little uneasy then. It had seemed to hold a significance for which he could see no reason: to him the *Seabird* was a tight little ship, well able, though sorely tried, to hold her own with the storm. To him collision with the ice had alone to be feared.

"Why?" he repeated, looking now at Big Jim. "Don't you think it lucky for us, sir, that the ice is keeping out of our way?"

"It's waiting for us, Davis," Big Jim replied. "It can't go on driving north for ever. It's bound to make a stand somewhere, and we'll hit it piled up solid. All piled up round the Pole," he added grimly.

"But the storm might blow itself out before then, mightn't it, sir? It's bound to, sometime. And this is pretty near the twentieth day of it."

"Mebbe it will," admitted Big Jim.

"Then we freeze," grunted Stewart.

"By Jove, yes. I never thought of that," the undermanager muttered, and for the first time he fully comprehended the seriousness of their plight: either the storm

would drive them to destruction, or leave them to be destroyed—to perish of hunger and cold in the heart of the Polar Seas.

“Didn’t that strike you before, Davis?” Big Jim enquired. “We are far into the frozen zone now. We wouldn’t get the chance to steam out, even though the storm did drop. We’d be frozen in. That’s why I held on so long in that last effort. Whatever happens to us, it is the last trip for the *Seabird*. Which is a pity, for she is a good little boat—better than I thought.”

“And our wireless, house and all, went in that wave,” said Davis in dismay. “Oh lord!”

He looked towards the front of the saloon and listened intently to the roar and crash of the seas.

“We canna’ make head against that,” said Stewart, divining his thought, “and we’re no’ going to try. It’s a’ we can do to face up to it. Gosh, it’s a snorter.”

The direction of his glance did not alter as Davis’s had done, but his alert old face growing more alert as he paused, showed that he was listening also, and gauging the strength of the seas. The *Seabird* was making very heavy weather of it. The saloon was being heaved about as though it were a matchbox on the end of a string jerked by a child.

“It’s worsenin’,” he said. “MacArthur has his hands full to hold her, I’m thinkin’. I’ll away up.”

He rose and stepped nimbly across to the lee-most alleyway. From where they sat, they could see him wait his chance to open the door. Quick though his exit was, however, a white flurry spewed in and washed over the floor.

“This won’t blow itself out for many a day,” said Big Jim, watching the fantastic pattern-making of the flurry on the carpet. “No freezing in for us, so you needn’t worry on that point. We’ll hit the ice first. Gad! it’s a regular prehistoric storm. Never seen anything like it. . . . There! He has got her. Do you notice the difference? And yet MacArthur’s touch is pretty sure.”

The motion of the vessel had become steadier. Old Stewart's hand was on the wheel.

"Can we do nothing, sir?" Davis enquired, the question suggested to him by this example of successful human endeavour.

"No more than we are doing. You're not worrying?"

"No," said Davis, and he spoke the truth. "But to be quite frank, sir, it is just a little difficult for me to realise that the sea is going to beat such a boat as the *Seabird*, with men like yourself, and Stewart and MacArthur to handle her."

Big Jim shook his head.

"I've done a lot of business in deep waters, Davis," he said gravely, "and seen a lot, and the more I've seen, the more I've had cause to know how poor a thing man is before the sea in its wrath—a leech on a Leviathan, nothing more, only able to hang on until he is flung off. The wonder to me has always been that he is allowed to hang on as long as he sometimes is. Steam has given you wrong ideas, I doubt, as it has given wrong ideas to most men, afloat and ashore. You were sailing ten or eleven years, weren't you?—And you never knew what you were sailing on! This is going to teach you. We'll hang on as long as we can. That's all we can do."

Another white flurry spewed out of the alleyway. MacArthur came splashing in.

"I want a drink, and I want it badly," he announced. "It's getting colder;" and this he said with a meaning glance to Big Jim.

Big Jim turned to Davis.

"Just as I thought," he said. "We are going to hit the ice first, and we're nearing it now. Gad! It must be a tremendous pack to make head against this."

He stopped to listen to the storm.

"Simply tremendous," he repeated. "It's our time to be flung off, Davis. We won't stand an earthly."

MacArthur leaned between them over the table and grinned into the undermanager's solemn face.

"Have you been holding some kind of a prayer-meeting?" he enquired; "or have you been touching the chief for a testimonial for your next crib? I would ask him now, if you haven't. You'll need it soon."

Still grinning, he lay down on the forward settee, hooked his hand round the safety rail to anchor himself in position, and went to sleep. They both smiled at him. More than humility had his chief learned from the sea, Davis thought. Not since before the finding of Satan Ferreira had he seen Big Jim smile.

2

Next day, the twenty-first since the passing of the tidal-wave, Davis, down in the engine-room, was sent for by Big Jim. He came on deck and climbed to the wheelhouse as bidden. There sat his chief and Stewart; MacArthur stood by the wheel. These three, the most skilful seamen aboard, had shared the steering since the beginning of the storm.

"Sit down and listen," Big Jim bade him.

He sat with them a little while. Outside the hurricane raged, its fury increased and increasing, its din almost deafening; but through the crash and roar of the seas, the howl of the wind and the whine and rattle of the spindrift, was coming another sound—a beat, an undertone, regularly recurring, only perceptible because of its regularity. He knew at once what it was. He had heard it before. During storms at sea he had heard it, when his ship had been steaming in narrow waters—the muffled thundering of surf, the ominous reverberation of a distant lee-shore. Beyond doubt their fate was plain now. The ice was standing. He was listening to the echoes of its conflict with the sea.

He nodded and rose.

"Any instructions?" he bawled to his chief.

"Keep steam up," Big Jim replied, and he did not need to bawl: his was the master-seaman's art of speaking clearly in a storm.

Davis nodded again and went below. When he returned on deck at the end of his trick, the beat had become a faint boom. Yet still the hurricane was waxing in violence, its voice a bellow that must have resounded round the world. So he thought; so he gave the thought expression, though not aloud; and it brought into his consciousness the memory of MacArthur's grimly humorous suggestion of the first day, when that lightning-riven cloud was mounting the horizon. Though MacArthur was sitting with them in the saloon, the whimsical expression more pronounced than always lurked in his features, quite seriously he put the question to Big Jim, "Do you think this is the end of the world, sir?"

"Our world, perhaps," Big Jim replied.

"*The* world, sir?"

"Who knows?" said Big Jim. "It began in strife and in strife it will doubtless end—if it does end. I have an idea, however, Davis, that ships are still being broken at Carn—Gad! I wonder if the Company will continue? We had built up a nice little business."

"And a nice little income you must have had from it, sir," said MacArthur.

The daring of the remark startled Davis. Amazed for a moment Big Jim stared at its maker. But he burst out laughing, and they all laughed. MacArthur's sense of oddity and knack of saying odd things had waxed with their danger and the violence of the hurricane.

"You had your share, my man?" said Big Jim, still chuckling.

"Ay, sir," began MacArthur, in his eyes the mischief of an impending pleasantry.

But he stopped short, listening.

A sudden clamour of voices had sounded from without. Word was coming of the most remarkable phenomenon of

the storm. Into the saloon burst one of the crew, shouting as he came :

“ A light to lee, sir ! There’s a light to lee ! ”

They stared at the man incredulously.

“ A light to lee,” he yelled.

“ Rubbish ! ” snapped Big Jim. “ Grip him, Davis. He’s gone mad. Quick ! ”

“ It is a light, sir,” the man protested. “ It’s flaring up as plain as anything. We’ve all seen it. Come out, sir ! Come out and see it, sir ! ”

Back he darted towards the door. Convinced by his earnestness, out they dashed after him, careless in their excitement of the incidence of the seas. One came aboard and nearly swept them away ; but hardly conscious of their escape, they clung to the combings rail and stared. For the man had not been mistaken. The light was there. Faint and far away it shone, low down, flaring and flickering—the first time the darkness had been broken since the Arctic night settled down.

It went out as they watched, as suddenly as though the waves had overwhelmed it. But it reappeared. The clamour of voices broke out afresh, the excited shouting of the watching crew. On the bridge deck, abaft the engine-room combings, were their quarters, a large, roomy house. On top all hands were gathered. Hope had come to them. Hope had come to Davis also. He stared and stared, fascinated, hypnotised ; and the light still flared before his eyes, growing brighter and brighter, even when it had again disappeared.

“ Come and see what the chief is about,” MacArthur bawled to him ; and Davis felt himself tugged towards the saloon.

Roused from the spell that the light had cast over him, he turned and stumbled after the skipper. They entered the saloon. Big Jim stood there, clinging on to the table, a chart spread out before him. The under-manager’s heart bounded as he saw how his chief’s eyes were gleaming.

"Do you think it is a volcano, sir?" he shouted, and a great eagerness was in his voice, for a volcano meant land to him, and land the chance of salvation. "A volcanic disturbance might have caused that wave, sir?" he urged as his chief remained silent, continuing his intent examination of the chart.

"There's been a volcanic disturbance all right, Davis," Big Jim at last replied. "A big disturbance, too, and it caused that tidal-wave. See here!" he said, pointing with his index finger on the chart. "Land used to be here. We've driven over it. It's gone down. But that light is no volcano. My God, no! Don't you know what it is? Can't you guess?"

His eyes were gleaming more brightly. Excitement was creeping into his voice, into his attitude.

"It's electric, man!" he shouted. "It's the ice making a stand! It's a *pressure glare*!"

He banged his fist down on the table, with such violence that the blow sounded like the smash of a sea.

"Gad! We're going to see something—the greatest lee-shore that has ever been! Gad!"

Again his fist smashed down. The table split. Off he went, moving swiftly from them, off to the bridge where Stewart was at the wheel. As the door crashed behind him, helped to its crash by the flick of a wave, MacArthur nodded expressively.

"He thinks Old Father Neptune is going to do him proud," he said.

"And he is pleased!" exclaimed Davis. "By Jove!"

On his way to the engine-room later the undermanager saw the light again. He paused to watch it. It was flaring up higher and brighter. Blue and ominous it looked. From the same direction came the booming, the pounding of mighty billows, the call of their doom. They were swooping to destruction, hurtling along in the grip of a hurricane inexorable as Fate. Yet he felt exalted. He was going in good company. . . .

He was roused that night by MacArthur ; wearied, he had gone to his berth at the finish of his trick below, and had fallen asleep, although he knew that the end was near.

"All hands," shouted the captain.

He sprang up instantly. The time had come. The din was terrific. The roar of breakers was louder than the roar of the storm. Yet the ship was steadier. He felt the quiver from an engine running at full power ; only at odd times hitherto had steam been given the *Seabird*, only when the need was urgent for driving her through a breaking sea.

"What have they done with the ship ? " he shouted.

"They've 'bouted her," MacArthur shouted in reply, and admiration of a great achievement still lingered in his tones. "The chief and Stewart. How they did it, I don't know, though I saw it done. We're running with the seas. Jove, there's some dandy steering being done. Come on ! Hell's right on top of us."

He left the berth, and flung open the saloon door. No waves were sweeping aboard the vessel ; the need for care in opening the door was past ; yet Davis clutched at his arm and drew him back—an involuntary action, nor one designed to save his companion from the danger of being swept away. It was simply that he was stunned, beaten almost unconscious, so great was the noise which had poured through the open doorway.

Understanding, MacArthur gripped him firmly and led him outside. Almost immediately, however, he recovered ; shaking off the steadying grip, he moved unaided towards the bridge-ladder, his sense of direction certain though the darkness was pitchy and he could not see. Yet he was conscious of the swift motion of the vessel, and of swiftly-moving waters ; conscious also of the nearness of some huge, solid mass towards which they were rushing, and he hurried in order to make the bridge and be with Big Jim before the crash should come. Others had been moved by the same motive, he

discovered ; he had to make his way through the midst of the crew. All hands in the moment of peril had gathered near their commander. And very bulky they seemed to have grown. Each man had put on nearly all his clothing, for it was bitterly cold.

A glimmer of light shone from the wheelhouse. Within stood Big Jim and Stewart, one on either side of the wheel, both grasping the spokes and steering, both staring intently through the look-out panes. They had disconnected the steam steering-gear, he noticed. Dandy steering was being done, as MacArthur had said. To their quick, deft touches, jerky, often, when a finer or more rapid effect was required, the steam could never have adequately responded. What it could have given in power, they were making good by the strength of their own strong arms.

Dandy steering!—the undermanager thrilled at the sight of it. Two big men they were, bearing unmoved tremendous physical strain ; each the inner knee bent, each a leg stretched outward and rigid, they held the force of the storm and the helm moved as they willed. The muscles and tendons stood out lumpy and rigid on the hands that grasped the spokes, yet round the wheel spun, to port, to starboard, as lightly as a child's toy caressed by a gentle puff of wind. Purpose was there. Something was being attempted—a glorious end, the *Seabird* rushing full tilt on death where death raged fiercest, a last gallant defiance of the might of the sea. Davis could not comprehend an alternative. Human safety did not, could not, exist in such a strife.

Wondering greatly, however, he moved forward to the bridge bulwark and peered into the darkness. He felt the greater nearness of that mass towards which they were rushing ; but he saw nothing. Still the darkness remained impenetrable.

“Wait till the light flares up. It's blazing like anything, straight ahead and high,” MacArthur called to him ; and his words sounded clear, far more clearly than

when he had bawled out in the shelter of the berth below ; the din had increased, but in increasing it had leaped the limits of human hearing ; the fine air-tremors which had bourne it, had coarsened until they could be felt against the skin.

No longer were lighter sounds obscured ; Davis had even heard the captain approaching. And he heard the voices, the shiftings of the hands as they spoke and stirred when the light flared out, shattering the darkness. But he heard them only for the moment that he stood bewildered and blinded by the sudden brilliance. The passing of the shock left him dumbfounded and aghast, deaf to all sound, insensible to everything but the grandeur, the wonder, the terror of the scene. In majesty and might the ice was standing. Hundreds of feet high it towered out of the sea.

To right and left it reared gigantic outpost pillars. To right and left, as far as he could see, it stretched its serried array, peak after peak, cliff towering upon cliff ; and between the pillars was a bay, whose apex cliffs rose to summits loftiest of all, where Death might well have sat enthroned and watched the turmoil ; whither the *Seabird* was heading, a speck borne by waves that towered as high as cliffs astern, that rose in front in mighty sweep to pour over the great walls and smother the peaks with their foam ; while from peak to peak, and right and left along the ranks of their array, and upward to the zenith and beyond, shone the light, a dawn, a vast refulgence, a sea of electric blue, a pressure glare—such pressure as might have been given to the making of a world !

The light went out. The wheelhouse windows glimmered. Within he saw Big Jim and Stewart. And the wheel spun between them, lightly to port, lightly to starboard ; at the steady, rigid in their grasp. Human purpose still held, human will—now, as in all time—pursued its way undaunted by the wild.

A sea caught, almost pooped the *Seabird*, but passed

beneath, lifting her high. The gale raked her as she rolled exposed on the crest, well nigh tearing her from her steersmen's grasp and flinging her broadside on. She sank to shelter in the troubled trough. Another sea grew beneath her bow. She began to rise. And like fine rain at first, fast growing to a heavy shower, to a deluge, the back-flung spray fell on her deck. The light returned. She lay on the shoulders of a wave that was leaping up to the apex cliffs and the summits that loomed over all.

Buoyant she rose to her end. Enormous, miles broad, miles long, the billow broke. Davis watched in awe, yet felt no fear. Neither sound nor movement came from the crew. Nonchalantly, over the bridge bulwark beside him, MacArthur leaned and smiled. It was a brave lee-shore, a magnificent debacle of brave lives. On either flank the barrier ice was stormed. The centre crest poured on, still rising, swirled between the lording peaks, and swelled; and with it went the *Seabird*, over and down, down a tumultuous cascade whose white waters foamed aboard yet did not overwhelm—down into darkness and on through darkness, buffeted but unharmed; borne along by a swiftly-flowing stream, that flowed from the sea through a cañon, through a cleft between the peaks at the apex of the bay, an opening in the ice, concealed by the ice as a magician's mirrors on a stage mask the path whence the vanished assistant has gone; yet marked by Big Jim and Stewart from afar, steered for by them, and won. Human purpose had triumphed—for a time. A respite had been granted. They fought to prolong it, still steered, the only men of the *Seabird's* crew who moved. Silent and still the others stood where they had chosen to die, silent and still as men who thought themselves dead. So they whirled on.

After a while MacArthur leaned towards Davis and shouted: "There's a place called Hades, isn't there, with rivers in it?"

But the undermanager did not reply. To him it seemed as though someone was trying to make a joke on the other side of the grave. He had not yet fully realised what had happened. Though the din of the lee-shore was dying behind him, he was still awaiting the crash that should have followed the breaking of the wave. MacArthur felt through the darkness for his shoulder, gripped it and shook him.

"Wake up," he cried. "The chief has hit some fancy river for us and we're still alive."

The shaking broke the undermanager's hold on the bridge bulwark. He staggered and would have fallen but for the grip on his shoulder. He was giddy, giddier than he had ever been before—the effect of the quick change from the wildness of the sea to the comparative calm of the river, and of the tremendous speed at which they were being borne. Limp as a lay figure, he hung at the end of the skipper's outstretched arm. MacArthur guided him back to the bulwark and propped him up in his former position.

"It will soon pass," he said. "I had it too."

The fit passed as the skipper spoke. Revived and comprehending, Davis took his own weight and looked around him—quickly, nervously, peering here, peering there. Somebody shrieked; one of the crew, who had wakened from his stupor, and in waking, wakened to fear. Davis bit his lip in vexation, for he thought the shriek was his own. It might have been, for all he could tell. Fear had nearly overwhelmed him also, taking him by surprise between the changing states of his soul; and before his will had sprung on guard and stilled his panicking senses, the impulse to cry out had been strong, so eerie and so awful was what he looked upon.

The light was out in the wheelhouse, and the greater light which had lit the lee-shore had vanished with the breaking of the billow; he could see nothing tangible, neither ship nor any of his companions, neither river which sped them, nor the walls of the cañon through which

it flowed ; even the bridge bulwark to which he held on, even its upper rail against which he was resting his brow, were invisible. Yet there was light of a kind. On either beam, how far away he could not tell, was a broad, wavering band of whiteness, which shed no radiance, which rose and fell, undulating, and, surging, broadened and thinned, yet ever remained—ghostly guiding lines by aid of which Stewart and Big Jim were steering, the foaming, phosphorescing wash of the river against the cañon sides ; the surgings but the swirl and rush of the waters round abutting masses ; the undulations but the passing of waves—the far-spreading ripples of the mighty breakers of the lee-shore,—all this he knew—he could hear the rushing of the river, he could tell of the cañon's existence from the echoes that echoed and re-echoed within its lofty walls,—yet almost it seemed to him that there was no river, no cañon, that they hurtled through darkness, through nothing, space infinite beneath and above them, and on all sides, a minor planet between two minor Milky Ways, a phantom ship and a company of souls, passed over, voyaging in the void.

“ Isn't this a ruddy knockout ? ” bawled MacArthur in his ear.

Davis giggled.

“ What's the matter with you now ? ” MacArthur growled, though in his voice also was a note of hysteria. “ You pass a perfectly good joke in silence—fetch a fainting fit over it, yet hoot like an owl at a simple little remark ? Don't you think—— ? ”

The *Seabird* lurched suddenly and listed, throwing them together and silencing MacArthur ; the helm had been put up hard. They clung to the bulwark, while round she payed, the list increasing dangerously. Davis heard the river rushing aboard, and, high above his head, saw one of the white bands of foam. The end of the bridge dipped under. A heavy splash of water whipped his face. Over she still went as though capsizing. Then up she came, righting. Once more they whirled on.

"Seem to have turned a corner," growled MacArthur. "Don't you think," he said, coolly completing his interrupted sentence, "this would pass as Hades?"

"Yes," replied the undermanager, but after a pause.

And there was no banter in his tone. With the turn he knew that the respite was ending. In his ears was the murmur of Lethe. Far astern was the lee-shore, its din now but an echo that boomed along in their wake, a reverberation of the breaking billow of each sea. Ahead was another conflict, whose din was a sound, continuous, not an echo, a steady drone; to him the roar of rapids, down which they would hurtle to oblivion.

So furious a stream could follow no other course; its speed, its violence was growing; it was hurrying along to some mighty leap. Scarcely had he answered MacArthur when the echo became inaudible. Scarce another minute and his loudest shout would not have been heard.

As though it were the engine roar of a gigantic aeroplane swooping on them down a tunnel, the drone increased. . . . The whiteness spread across the river. The cañon ended. They debouched on the new turmoil. Suddenly the *Seabird* leaped upward, whipped round overthrowing all her crew, dashed off at a tangent through wildly-surfing waters, and as suddenly slid into quietness, her speed yet greater than before. And at that moment the great glare returned. Davis, dragging himself upright, first to rise, saw whither she had carried them. Not into rapids—into the grip of an enormous whirlpool.

Three and a half
Ch. 1 - Circular Landing 3

In an amphitheatre of ice the whirlpool spun, beneath cliffs as mighty as those which had battled with the seas. The cañon river fed it; through a weakness in the icy barrier the storm was hurling its might, only thus to be balked. But the baffled violence had pared the walls of the amphitheatre clean, cut off outlying fragments, and

shaken every pendant mass down. Sheer and glittering the cliffs rose, only a narrow rim of foam at their base, except for the broad surge where the river poured in, and where, here and there, a fissure flung back its stolen waters or caused a minor eddy. Beyond and beneath, the surface of the whirl dropped down, dark, gleaming, unbroken; so vast that shadow filled its lower depths though the light was dazzling, brighter than the light of the sun. Up through the shadow came a sound that caused fear at last to enter Davis's soul—the gurgle of the great sink-hole where the waters sucked away.

The drone had smothered it as they approached. Now it was distinct and horrible. It brought terror to the crew. Some stood as though turned to stone, some hid their faces in their hands, some dropped on their knees; and one or two of the last seemed to pray.

A seaman's end, a quick death on a lee-shore, they could have met like seamen; except for the one man who had momentarily panicked, they had borne the awesome passage of the cañon unmoved. But this gurgling horror sucked their manhood from them. Round and round above it they were doomed to spin, for hours perhaps, round and round, each turn bringing them a little nearer—only a little! Before such a prospect their morale completely broke down.

Davis knew what they were feeling, and felt with them; yet neither by word nor action could he help them. Helpless himself, seized by the most terrible fear he had ever known, he had to grip the bridge bulwark and dig his fingers into the hard wood until his nails split and the splinters pierced deep into his flesh, to keep himself from giving way as completely. It was then he learned how courageous a man was MacArthur. Undaunted, the skipper strode among his crew and sought to rally them: laughed at them, bawled in their ears, shook them, lost his temper and kicked them. Davis turned his face away, ashamed, yet still afraid; unable, in spite of such an example to master his horror of the creeping death and

then the plunge, the quick suck down as though into a drain.

Yet the horror passed, imperceptibly, slowly, as the chill from the limbs of an unconscious man before the glow of a fire ; in the glow of a courage greater than his own, his courage revived ; he no longer felt afraid. Dimly aware of the cause, he turned his head and saw. And a cry of amazement and gladness burst from him. The panic was broken. Man was deified. . . . He saw Big Jim.

Out from the wheelhouse, from the useless wheel, his chief had come, a man exalted, a man enthralled : old in the wonder of the deep, exultant, glorying, for that the deep had kept its greatest wonder to glorify his passing. Master mariner, master of men, mighty Captain of the Seas, he had rallied his crew. They stood around him, men from whom all fear had fled, men conscious only of the splendour of their closing scenes. Before them, Creation was passing her forces in review. For them, the gods were playing the drama of the Beginning and the End. From him had come the power to see. His master spirit had touched the eyes of their souls. . . .

The light went out, flared up, went out again, an hour passed, the *Seabird* sank low, but the spell holding her crew did not lessen, nor did the grandeur pall. Though the glittering cliffs were lost to view, the gleaming whirl remained, greater by far than the cliffs, reflecting more varied hues, waxing in wonder and majesty the further its depths were disclosed. One man alone did not stand with them. One man remained unmoved. . . . Old Stewart. Unnoticed, he left the bridge, and went below, and in his berth, an aged mariner, wearied by his long spell at the wheel, he slept to the end.

To Davis the end seemed to come very suddenly. He had thought the descent barely two-thirds completed, when the whirl began to sway. The motion of the *Seabird*, hitherto smooth and steady, became irregular ; she rolled and heaved, and plunged ; her speed greatly

lessened ; and though the change took place in darkness, the signs were yet plain. They had slipped into the rougher, slower waters near the lip of the vortex. Soon they would dip over, and plunge down.

He felt his chief's hand on his shoulder, and thought Big Jim was bidding him farewell. Big Jim spoke to him—an order. So surprised was the undermanager, that it had to be repeated to him before he obeyed. It was the order to shut off steam. Ever since the call "All hands," the engines had been running. What did it matter at such a time, he thought, whether they were left running or no ? But he went below and shut off the steam. As he turned from the throttle to return, he found MacArthur barring his way. And MacArthur was mad.

"King Eddy has busted himself," the captain announced solemnly.

Davis gazed at him in pity.

"My dear fellow. Don't look at me like that," said MacArthur just as solemnly. "Don't you understand ? The whirl has ceased to whirl."

The motion had become more gentle. The drone had lessened. Cries sounded clear from above. Enlightened, yet incredulous, Davis dashed on deck and looked over-side. The light had returned. He saw the whirl—but no longer as a gigantic funnel : as a basin—a basin rapidly becoming shallower. The power had left the waters. Their violence was subsiding. One thing only could have happened ; and it had happened in time. Under the stress of the storm the cañon had closed ; the river which fed the whirl had ceased to flow.

4

The glitter of the cliffs again came into view. The *Seabird* rose from the depths. Soon she floated in the centre of a still sea ; and from afar came the roar of the lee-shore. Faint it was. The cheering of the crew blotted

it out. They made high revelry over their deliverance, and the amphitheatre rang with joyous echoes. But in the saloon there was no revelling. Gravely the four men there faced the position. It was not a whit less desperate than before. Only another respite had been granted.

"We have four months' stores," Big Jim said significantly. "And perhaps——"

"And perhaps in forty years some polar exploration party will find us," said MacArthur. "That's about the size of it, isn't it, sir?"

"Perhaps in four hundred. And when they come they will need to fly or submarine. We are plumb in the centre of the biggest heap-up since the Ice Age, one big pressure ridge that a chamois could not cross. That cañon was at least fifty miles long, which means that the barrier round us is close on fifty miles thick; and beyond that there will be two or three hundred miles of ordinary polar freeze. Gad! They will put it on the map when they find it. Thinking of trying to find a way out, Davis?"

"It's at least worth trying, sir, don't you think?"

"Oh yes, we'll try."

"And if we are not electrocuted, we'll do about a mile a year," said MacArthur. "You haven't been in the Arctic before and had the job of crossing an ordinary pressure ridge, Davis, or you would be a little more cheerful. I am not a pessimist as a rule," he added seriously, speaking to Big Jim. "But the best thing we can do is to open the seacocks before we are frozen up around and held. That crawl down that whirl was bad enough. But four months hang on here!—ye gods! there'll be murder aboard this ship before half that time is up. The hands will go mad."

"We'll no scuttle the *Seabird*," said old Stewart, the only remark he had made during the conversation.

But MacArthur continued to look at Big Jim enquiringly, awaiting an answer to his suggestion.

"We'll hang on," Big Jim answered. "A lot may happen in four months."

"Right, sir," said the captain. "We hang on, and it's not such a bad graveyard, either."

"If only our wireless hadn't gone in that tidal-wave," murmured Davis.

"It wouldn't have been any good with all the electricity loose above to interfere with it," said Big Jim. "And even if we could have used it, who could reach us here?—no, Davis! We'll try for a way out once this storm eases, even if only to keep the hands employed. Meanwhile, let's get busy on the stores. We'll make them go as far as possible. One never knows."

"We have come safely through so much already," remarked Davis hopefully. "I hope this giddy old storm eases soon, and lets us begin trying."

The storm lasted ten days more; and with its easing the strange light ceased to flare. But the sky cleared. The stars shone. Sign of the wild weather that had been, the Northern Lights seldom ceased to stretch their long fingers over the heavens. There was light enough to see almost to full visual range. It revealed nothing other than had been feared. The ice that formed round the *Seabird* made approach to the cliffs easy enough; with little difficulty paths were cut to their crests. But that was as far as they could go. Try where they might to go further, the result was the same. They had escaped destruction by the tidal-wave, traversed the lee-shore, and risen from the depths of the whirl, only to be held prisoner by the power which had saved them. The barrier was impassable to any creeping thing.

From the loftiest crest Big Jim and Davis surveyed it. First to ascend, they were first to comprehend the utter hopelessness of their plight. Davis felt as though he were isolated on the highest spire of a cathedral; as though he were looking down on its steeply-sloping roof, and on other roofs, which, chasms between, stretched as far as he could see; over all of which his task was to climb. Yet the barrier was no such system of ordered units; it was a chaos of ruins—of splintered masses, of pinnacles and

knife edges reared at every angle, of rubble piles—all criss-crossed with crevasses. His notion sprang from the sense of insecureness that the scene suggested ; of surface without support ; of obstacle without hold. As well he might have tried to cross a forest by way of its tree tops ; everywhere was the suggestion of the drop beneath. As well he might have tried to cross a bog on foot, an impenetrable bog traversed by impenetrable *chevaux-de-frise*.

“ This is the sort of thing that would set MacArthur singing, ‘ Had I the wings of a dove,’ ” said Big Jim. “ Can you see a way through ? ”

In silence Davis turned his thumbs down. In silence they descended.

At the foot of the cliff, however, they paused again ; they gazed round the great amphitheatre in which the *Seabird* lay, each struck by the same thought. Above, a breeze had been blowing, the barrier growling and complaining as its loose surface ice shifted and fell. Here there was perfect stillness, perfect quiet ; eternal stillness, eternal quiet, in the midst of which the *Seabird* had found for them a haven, where they might rest until the end of Time ; a whole ship, a whole crew, sleeping peacefully, sleeping securely, until the Angel of the Deep Waters should call “ All Hands.”

“ The secret of MacArthur’s humour is its fundamental truth,” said Big Jim abruptly. “ It’s not such a bad graveyard.”

They moved on.

But many times thereafter, Davis returned and climbed the outlook crest to look over the barrier ; and the day came when he looked in bitterness. The day came when it held them though a clear road to safety was not very far away. A thing happened that not one of them had expected. The great pack moved south.

As well as the ice, the waters had been driven north by the storm ; a greater depth had been given to the polar seas. With the ceasing of the pressure, the waters

receded. Strong currents set southward, and the ice drifted with them. With the ice went the *Scabird* and her crew.

Swiftly they travelled at first. By the end of a fortnight they saw the glimmer of day. By the end of a month, the skies were lightening for about half an hour in the twenty-four. Hope rose high. Then the southward progress slowed and hope faded. Though the end of the third month saw the sun rising above the cliffs and Carn little more than three weeks' sail away, other havens of refuge much nearer, the greater light only revealed greater strength in their prison, and the nearness of safety but made their disappointment the more hard to bear.

Another ship, another captain, and MacArthur's prophecy would have come true: murder would have been done by men driven mad by despair. But aboard the *Scabird* discipline held to the end, and respect for Big Jim remained and grew. The days passed as other days. Duties were done. Even when all definite hope had vanished, the feeling that he was invincible lingered on, that through him safety might yet come. And as a memory from the distant past the memory came to Davis of a man who had been growing old in the offices of Carn, whose interest in life had gone. That blight had been removed. They had gone down to the sea in a ship, and in deep waters his chief had found calm, in their might renewed the strength of his soul.

At the beginning of the fourth month the southward progress ceased, and for several days the pack lay still.

"A northerly swell is making against it," said Stewart, when asked what he thought was the cause; and Big Jim agreed, for no adverse wind was blowing.

"Jove, the pack must be pretty big, sir," said Davis. "There's no sound of the swell breaking; and we haven't heard the slightest murmur of the sea since that storm left us. Do you think it will ever smash up?"

"If it goes much further south it will," Big Jim replied.

"We are not so very far away from what is usually open water as it is. Gad! Davis," he exclaimed. "I am glad you haven't got that wireless!"

"Why?" demanded the undermanager in surprise.

Big Jim took a little time to reply, and seemed as if he regretted his exclamation.

"Because," he said at last, "I would be willing to bet my last dollar my mother has ships looking for us not very far away, and it would simply be hell for her if she knew we were here. . . . We will probably drift back north now," he added, as though in explanation of any feeling he might have shown.

But the ice did not set north; its southerly drift began again. A wind came away from the north-west, and blew so strongly that the rate of progress became as great as when the waters first receded from the Pole. It blew for seven days, and steadily strengthened. On the eighth it was a gale. And on that day they heard what seemed the murmur of a lee-shore.

Big Jim drew Davis's attention to the sound. Together they climbed the outlook crest to listen. And eagerly the undermanager looked northward, bravely peering into the bitter eye of the gale—for what had been but a murmur, heard on the level of the *Seabird*, now sounded as a distant roar. It was the outside world speaking, the silent world from which the inscrutable ice had cut them off so long.

Weirdly the echoes came muttering over the ice-caps, sighing, throbbing, rumbling, impalpable as the reverberations through a clear, sun-shot sky of thunder far away, as mysterious, as arresting as the sudden breathings of a hidden sleeper in a house whose other occupants had thought themselves alone. Some great new turmoil had arisen. Somewhere away to the northward, whence the gale was blowing, another great onslaught on the ice was being made. The undermanager's eagerness grew; he strained his eyes, without knowing what he was doing he stood on his tip-toes even, in the effort to increase his

visual range. For the pack had weakened since its staunch stand against the hurricane ; it had borne the strain of the long southward journey ; it had left far behind its impregnable base in the frozen seas. And it seemed as he listened the din drew nearer, the echoes louder grew.

An excited query on his lips he turned to his chief, and what he saw struck him dumb ; so added to his excitement that he choked from his incipient attempt to speak. He had made a tremendous error ; the message from the outside world had a far greater significance than he had thought. Big Jim had his back to him. Big Jim was gazing south. *South!*—where no lee-shore could be. Whence yet was coming the roar.

“ Sir !—Sir ! ” he at last managed to whisper. “ What’s happening, sir ? ”

It was his tug on the arm that made his chief turn and reply to him.

“ I don’t know, Davis,” Big Jim said slowly. “ But it is something very big.”

“ It’s not the pack disintegrating?—It could never be that ? ”

“ I don’t know,” Big Jim replied. “ But I don’t know what else it can be.”

“ Jove ! ” murmured Davis. “ Oh by Jove ! If only it would ! . . . ” An hour later he found himself alone ; so intent had his watch southward become, he had not noticed Big Jim go.

But he saw him on the ice below, already halfway across to the *Seabird* and hurrying. As quickly as he could he followed. The hands were grouped expectantly outside the saloon when he climbed aboard. Within, sat Big Jim, Stewart, and MacArthur, a chart spread out before them at which they earnestly stared. No one moved or spoke as he entered. The silence was tense. He sat down and tried to be calm.

“ Is there a chance, sir ? ” he asked, and in spite of the effort he had made his voice quivered.

Big Jim nodded.

"Here's about where we are," he explained, pointing on the chart. "Practically in normally navigable waters. We think"—his voice quivered a little also—"We think——"

"We're sure," interrupted Old Stewart. "*I'm* sure."

"Of what?"

"We think, Davis," Big Jim quietly resumed, "that the wind is driving us on to an unswept minefield."

MacArthur passed Davis the carafe; the undermanager had grown very pale.

"You take a nip, old man," the skipper urged him; but Davis ignored the advice; his glance was transfixing Stewart.

"Tell me why you are sure, Stewart," he said. "I'm wandered. Give me something to grip on to. Things have happened too quickly for me to follow them, and I started wrong. What makes you say you are sure! . . . Tell me, man!"

"Because I heard tell o' mines being laid hereabouts," grunted the mate. "I've been expecting to hear them go for a while. It's them. What else can it be? I'm sure.—So is he," he added, nodding towards Big Jim.

"We'll be sure before the light goes, anyhow," said Big Jim. "Better put the hands wise, MacArthur."

"And that makes it sure enough, Davis," remarked the skipper as he rose.

And ere the light faded from the skies complete confirmation had come; the tumult had drawn steadily nearer; its voice filled the heavens; and the darkness came up from the south that evening, stealing a march on the day under cloak of the smoke of the bursting mines.

Over a wide area the din sounded, and many notes made it. It swelled and diminished, now murmuring and roaring in the distance, now volleying closer at hand, now bellowing more closely still; and ever the sky, like a mighty cathedral roof, held thunderous echoes; a gigantic keyboard was being struck by giant hands.

The whole pack was being attacked ; the whole pack was being destroyed. Man was accomplishing by his works what the power of the elements had failed to do. Violently the *Seabird* trembled from the tremors of ice and water. From all around the amphitheatre came rendings and groanings, the mourning of the mighty cliffs before their impending doom. Intermingled the sounds of furious toil, the rasp of saws, the ring of pickaxes, the cracking detonation of mobile explosive charges, as all hands laboured to break the ice about the vessel, to clear for her a passage to the point where the cañon had closed. There the cliffs were expected to split, if split they did. After that——? Whether destruction in the dying flurry of the pack, or death from the venom of the field, no one thought, no one cared ; let them but be given the sea. . . . Steam was up, all was done, when the din drew away and ceased, nor did it break out again. The field had been traversed, and the barrier remained. The pack had outlasted the mines.

Big Jim slid overside, safely made his way to solid ice, and disappeared into the darkness. They knew whither he was going, and what his purpose was. Tense and silent they awaited his return ; and the cliffs still groaned and mourned.

He was gone a long time.

In the blackness before the dawn he came back. They thronged around him ; and their suspense broke and vanished in yell after yell of jubilation—such jubilation as only seamen can express, who, as well as life, are promised a long-denied sea.

“ I’ve seen the sea, boys,” were his first words. “ It’s not a mile away. . . . We are going to get clear,” he told them, when their cheering was done. “ The pack is shattered. It’s blowing stronger. That cliff will go any moment now. . . . Stand by ! ”

Down in the engine-room, Davis heard the thunderclap of the splitting cliff. The telegraph bell rang, music to his ears ; he turned round his lever, and heard the sweeter

music of engine and screw. But the bump and jar of the ice against the side kept him from joining his voice to the harmony, though his soul sang. Danger was around. Many times all the skill of his skilful fingers was tested as the *Seabird* slowed, backed and spurted in the maze of the floating débris of the floe. But at last her course became steady. At last the long awaited order came. He shut off steam, and led the helter-skelter as Big Jim called "All hands." Not this time a direful summons! Again they gathered on the bridge around him—not this time to draw from him strength to overcome their terror of some wonder of the deep waters; but to rejoice, to glory with him in the greatest wonder of all—to watch the sun come up over the open sea.

THE END

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